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OPEN ALL NIGHT

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NUMBER 3

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Edited by

LESLIE CHARTERIS

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MURDER SET TO MUSIC

by Frederic Brown

IT STARTED on a Tuesday evening in early October. It had been a fine evening, up to then. I'd made a good sale and when the phone rang I guessed that it was Danny and was glad he'd called so I'd have a chance to tell him about it.

Danny Bushman and I run a used car lot together. My name is Ralph Oliver. Danny and I have been close friends since we started high school together. He played trumpet and I played sax and we played together in the high school band and orchestra, and in our junior and senior years we made our spending money playing at parties and dances.

After graduation we were apart for a year. Danny got a few thousand bucks from his father's life insurance—his mother had died before he entered high school—and he threw it into starting a small but hot dance band, which he called *The Bushmen,* from his own name which, in case you've forgotten already, was Bushman. He wanted me to go with him on it, but I had other ideas. I enrolled as a student at the Wisconsin Conservatory of Music. Both of my parents had died by then too (funny how many parallels there have been in Danny's life and mine, in big things as well as little ones) but I figured I could work my way through by playing evenings. I found that I could, but I also found within a year that longhair, although not for the birds was not for me either, and I quit. And in just the same length of time Danny found out that he was a better trumpet player than a band leader and *The Bushmen,* as Danny put it, went back to the bushes.

For the next ten years we blew for our bread and butter, and managed most of the time to stick together. If not in the same band, at least in bands in the same city.

Something happened then that might have broken up our friendship, but only showed how strong it was. We both fell in love with the same girl, Doris Dennis, who was a singer with Tommy Drum's orchestra, with which both Danny and I were playing at the time. She liked both of us but Danny was the one she fell for. They were married, and still we were friends. All three of us, in fact.

A few months later, Tommy Drum got behind the eight ball and had to break up the orchestra. Almost any musician who's really good, and Tommy Drum was, tries his hand as an orchestra leader once; few of them are businessmen enough to make a go of it.

Danny and I, with Doris kibitzing, had a conference to decide what band might be able to take both of us on,

and ended up deciding, with Doris abetting, that we were getting a little old for the game. Most dance musicians quit and get into something else by the time they're thirty, and that's how old we were. And we both happened to be solvent enough for it to be a good time for us to make the break. We'd all been working steadily for quite a while and I had a fairish sum salted. Danny had somewhat less, mostly because he had a weakness for the ponies, but Doris had some savings and wanted to advance Danny enough to make his share match mine, if we could find a good place to put it.

We kicked it around, and the only thing we both knew and liked besides music was cars. So we ended up with a used car lot. Back in the small city Danny and I had come from.

That was almost a year ago, and we were beginning to do all right. At least we were out of the red and into the black, and we made money when we had a good day. A good day is one when we make two good sales of relatively late model cars; one sale gets us off the nut and a second one is gravy.

It was a quarter of nine when Danny phoned and I was just getting ready to shut up shop. We keep open from nine to nine, with Danny opening the lot in the morning and quitting at dinner time and with me starting after lunch and working till closing, which puts two of us on the lot during the afternoon and one each mornings and evenings. Danny said, "Hi, Ralph. How goes it?"

"Crazy," I told him. "I sold the fifty-three Buick."

"Attaboy. Full price?"

"Full price, except that for cash I promised him four new tires. It's still a good deal."

"I'm flipping," he said. "But I got some good news too. Guess who's in town?"

"I'll bite. Who? Eisenhower?"

"Better than that. Tommy Drum. He's got a cool combo, and they're opening tonight at the Casanova Club. Need I say more?"

"Did you make reservations?"

"For three. Only you'll have to pick me up and take me there. Doris is at a hen party and she took my heap, so I'm afoot. But I phoned her and she'll join us as soon as her party breaks up, probably around eleven. Can you come right here, or will you have to go home first?"

"I'll come right there. I can wash up and shave there and bum a clean shirt. The rest of my clothes will do."

"Hit it, man. My pad is panting."

We don't ordinarily talk that way, but it came natural to go back to the jive when we were going to see Tommy again and dig his combo. It could be good if he had the right support. Tommy Drum, despite his name, plays a very cool piano.

It took me ten or fifteen minutes to put the lot to sleep and to climb aboard the old Merc I use for my own transportation—although when I'm on the lot it's there too, in case anybody wants to buy it—and another fifteen or twenty to Danny's "pad." He and Doris have a small apartment on the north side. Neat but not gaudy. It's in a small building, only four apartments, two on each floor, and the Bushmans' is the downstairs one on the left.

I tried the knob first, thinking Danny would probably have left it unlocked so I could walk right in, and was surprised when the door wouldn't open. I knocked, and then again and louder.

There was only silence on the other side. Could Danny have dozed off? Hardly, and besides he was a light sleeper; even my first light knock would have wakened him. It didn't make sense, that silence. Expecting me any minute, he wouldn't have gone out anywhere.

It had been minutes now, and I began to get worried. Anywhere in that small apartment he must have heard me. But I tried again and still harder, and called out his name.

This got me open the door on the other side of the hall, and a man with rumpled gray hair looking at me through the doorway. I'd been introduced to him once—but didn't remember his name—as a neighbor of the Bushmans. He said, "Oh—it's you," so he recognized me too, and then, "Is something wrong?"

I said, "I know Danny's home—he must be. But—"

He stared at me. "You know," he said, "I thought I heard a kind of thud across there a little while ago. If you think—These locks are awfully flimsy. I think together we could—"

But already I'd thrown my weight against the door, and he was right about the lock; it broke and the door flew open on my first lunge.

Danny, fully dressed except for his suit coat, lay stretched, spread-eagled, on the living room rug with his feet toward the door. I ran to him and bent over him, fumbling to open his shirt at the collar to give him air and farther down to reach in and feel for a heartbeat. The neighbor had come as far as the doorway and I yelled over my shoulder to him to phone for an ambulance. I said a police ambulance because I thought it would get us faster service whatever this was, whatever had happened. And I thought I knew because his otherwise spotless white shirt was dirty just where it would have been dirtied by someone giving him a few kicks after knocking him out. It looked like a going-over.

His heart was okay. I ran to the bathroom and wet a washrag with cold water. I had his head in my lap and was using it on his forehead when the neighbor came back. He said, "They're coming. Is he—all right?"

"He's alive. I think he's been beaten up." Danny was moaning a little now, beginning to come around.

"Is there anything I can—?"

I said, "There's brandy in the cabinet over the kitchen sink. Bring some."

He brought the bottle, a pint about half full. He took the cap off and handed it to me. Danny's eyes were open now, but a bit glazed. His lips opened, though, when I held the mouth of the bottle against them, and he gulped and shuddered when I raised the bottle enough to give him a good sized slug.

Then he tried weakly to sit up but I held him back lightly by a shoulder. I said, "Take it easy, kid. There's an ambulance coming and you'd better lie still. You might have something broken."

Two uniformed cops were coming in the doorway. From a radio car, we learned later, that had happened to be cruising only a few blocks away when they'd got the message.

I beat them to the punch by asking if an ambulance was coming.

"Yeah," one of them said. "What's up?"

"A beating, I think," I told him. Danny tried to say something but I shushed him. "Wait for some strength, Danny. Let us tell our stories first; they're simpler."

But we all three had time to tell our stories before the ambulance came and Danny's was as simple to tell as ours. Or simpler. A few minutes after talking to me on the phone he'd been going to the door to unlock it so I could let myself in when I came, and there was a knock on the door before he reached it. Danny's first reaction had been that he'd misjudged the time and that I was here already and he'd thrown the door wide open. A big man with a handkerchief tied over his face and a hat pulled down over his eyes stepped through the doorway and

had swung a right at Danny's jaw that Danny had barely seen coming and didn't have time even to try to duck. And that was the last thing he remembered until he came to, with his head in my lap.

Did he know the guy? No, and he wouldn't be able to identify him if he saw him again. A big guy, maybe six feet and at least a couple of hundred pounds, and that was all the description he could give. Danny thought he wore a brown suit but he wasn't even sure of that. There'd probably been quite literally only a second between the time he'd opened the door and the time he'd gone down and out.

And no, he didn't have any enemies that he knew of and didn't have the faintest idea what it was all about. Either the guy was crazy or it was a case of mistaken identity and he thought he was beating up somebody else.

Danny kept saying he was okay and trying to sit up, but I told him for all we knew he could have some broken ribs and we didn't want one puncturing a lung. When the ambulance came, they were gentle about getting him on the stretcher.

I rode with him to the emergency hospital, but we didn't talk much on the ride. Danny said that from the hospital I'd better get to the Casanova Club fast to be sure of being there in time to meet Doris; she'd be worried if she got there first and didn't find either of us. I said okay, but it was still only half past nine; there was lots of time and I'd wait until they'd at least have given him a quick once over. So that, if there wasn't anything serious—and we were both beginning to think there wasn't—I could reassure Doris and not frighten her.

It didn't take long, once we got there. I was in the waiting room only twenty minutes when a doctor came in and gave me the news: nothing broken, nothing seriously wrong.

Danny was going to have a sore jaw and some sore ribs, a few bruises other places, but nothing worse. As far as the hospital was concerned he could be released right away, if he felt up to going home, although the doctor advised him to lie quietly and rest another half hour or so before leaving.

"You say as far as the hospital is concerned," I said. "What else?"

"The police," he said. "They are sending a detective around to talk to him."

They let me in to talk to Danny again. They'd stripped him for the examination and he was getting his clothes back on, a bit painfully. He said, "Listen, Ralph, I'm stuck here till some dick comes to grill me, but maybe I can still get to the Casanova before Doris does. And if so, don't say anything—"

"Nuts," I said. "You can't keep this from Doris. It may or may not make the papers, but you're going to be a lot sorer tomorrow morning when you wake up than you are right now. You'll probably need help to get dressed. And your jaw will probably be too sore to chew toast for breakfast. You'll have to tell her *something* and it might as well be the truth. Why not?"

He saw that, and gave in, provided I'd play it down instead of up if I had to be the one to tell her.

I caught a cab from the hospital back to his place to get the Merc, and it was ten o'clock by the time I got it. The Casanova's well west of town, about an hour's drive, but I drove fast and made it well before eleven. I thought ruefully about how much cab fare was going to cost Danny, but there wasn't any out on that.

The joint was jumping. It was a good thing Danny had phoned and reserved a table. Even so, it was a lousy table for our purpose; the room was L-shaped and this one was around the corner and out of sight of the bandstand. No

doubt we'd be able to get ourselves a better one later, though; the people who had come mostly for dinner would be starting to leave now.

So I took the table without argument and ordered myself a highball. It might be amusing to listen to the combo before I saw it, to see if I could guess who Tommy Drum had with him. Tommy's piano I'd have known anywhere. The sax was not quite up to it, and I couldn't place it; it could have been any one of a hundred tenor saxes. Smooth tone and no goofing, but weak on improvisation; Tommy's piano could lead him just so far out but no farther. But it was adequate and it was something the squares could dig. The skins were much better but I didn't place the drummer until he took a solo and started to go to town—but in a civilized way—on the Chinese cymbal. It was Frank Ritchie; I'd never played with him but I knew him and had heard him often, always with combos. He was a combo man and didn't like band work. He was right in his element with Tommy; it could have been a great combo with a better sax.

Well, I'd identified the drummer and I'd given up on the sax so I left my half-finished drink on the table and strolled out to where I could see the bandstand. I knew the sax after all, although not well. It was Mick O'Neill, a guy Danny and I had played with two or three times for short periods. Danny had never liked him, had almost had a fight with him once, but I got along okay with him. Mick had got his start in New Orleans and he was strictly a Dixieland man; he was good at that but way over his head in the kind of stuff Tommy Drum was playing tonight. I wondered why Tommy had picked him.

A hand touched my sleeve and a voice said, "Hi, Oliver. Sit down." I looked down and saw it was Max Stivers. Bookmaker and racketeer, I'd heard. I'd met him around a few places.

He said, "This is Gino Itule," and nodded to his companion. "Gino, Ralph Oliver." And I reached across and shook hands with a man built like a beer barrel.

"Sit down," Stivers repeated. "Saw the lousy table they gave you. You can't see from there."

I slid into the vacant seat beside him. "Thanks," I said. "Until somebody I'm expecting shows up." I looked around for a waiter. "I'll have my drink brought over."

"Forget it," Stivers said. "I'll get you a fresh one." He reached a hand in the air and snapped his fingers and suddenly we had not one but three waiters coming toward us. I ordered a rye and soda from one of them and grinned at Stivers. "Real service you get."

"I should. I own a piece of the joint. Say, you're an ex-musician, aren't you? What do you think of the combo that's starting tonight?"

"Came to catch them; they're old friends of mine. So my opinion would be prejudiced."

When the waiter brought my drink it occurred to me that now, while I was sitting with the owner of a piece of the joint, would be a good time to start pushing for a better table, but Stivers stopped me and waved the waiter away. He said, "Take this table. Gino and I are leaving in a minute. And it's bigger; your friends in the band will probably want to join you when they take a break."

That solved that and I thanked him. Racketeers may not be nice people but they're nice people to know, when they're on your side.

They left a minute later and a minute after that Tommy Drum looked my way and I caught his eye and waved. He didn't wave back or even nod, but his music went into a tricky little phrase that had once been a joke between us. And a few minutes later he ended the number and came over to my table.

I said it was swell to see him again.

"Crazy," he said, grinning ear to ear. "How goes the filling station?"

"Used car lot. It goes, somewhat. How goes the combo?"

"You heard it," he said. He shook his head sadly. "My kingdom for a saxaphone. You don't want a job again, do you, Ralph?"

"Off it for good, Tommy. I'm a car salesman now, and a businessman. Maybe there isn't much dough in it yet, but we're building it up; we'll get there."

"Just evenings, just while we're booked here—a month. You can put in some time on the lot days."

I shook my head. "Sorry, Tommy, but it's out. But what gives? How come you hired Mick? You know he's a Dixie boy."

"Do I, do I? It's a long sad, Ralph. Wingy Tyler's blowing for me—one of the best in the business, short of the real top boys I couldn't afford. Man, can that cat blow. And this morning, two hours or so before plane time for our booking here, he goofs on me. Know what he does, like?"

"What does he do, like?"

"Ruptures his appendix, that's all. Well, the operation went fine; we couldn't wait but I had the doc send me a telegram. But Wingy's out for the month we're booked here. So there I am in Pittsburg, two hours to plane time, and I run into Mick just when I think I'm going to have to cancel. He says he's going west anyway so he'll come along for the ride and fill in till I get somebody. It's fine with Mick the minute I replace him—you won't be undercutting him. Nohow, Jackson."

He lighted a cigarette for me that I'd just stuck in my mouth. "Think it over, anyway. Talk to Danny about it; *he'll* tell you not to let an old man down. Where is he?"

"Coming later. So's Doris."

"Crazy. Why don't you people stay home, though?

Found both you and Danny in the fun book, and kept calling first one number then the other till I finally got Danny at half past eight."

"You should have called the lot; we were both there all afternoon."

"I looked for it, but I looked under filling stations." He glanced at his watch and got up quickly. "Back to the mountain," he said. "This is supposed to be in the middle of a set, so that's why I told the other boys to stay up there. We'll all be over later. Hasta banana."

I looked at my watch too, wondering about Doris. It was almost half past eleven. Well, half an hour isn't late for a woman.

Danny came in a few minutes later. There was a stocky middle aged man with him and if the man wasn't a cop then he was disguised as one; he wore a shiny blue serge suit, carried a soft black felt hat that the check girl hadn't been able to take away from him, and wore the first pair of high shoes I'd seen in a long time. He had a round face and sad eyes.

Danny introduced him as Lieutenant Andrews.

Danny grinned at me. "I persuaded him to third-degree me while driving me out here. Look at the cab fare I saved."

"He didn't have to talk me into it," Andrews said. "I wanted to talk to you, and to Drum. He's the one playing piano by there, isn't he?"

I nodded, but I asked, "Why to him? He couldn't have had anything to do with what happened to Danny."

He gave me a level look. "Then you know all about what happened to your partner?"

"Of course not. But I see what you mean." I happened to look toward the entrance and I said, "Here comes Doris. Listen, Lieutenant, how's about you and me strolling over to the bar for a few minutes. You want to

question me anyway, and that'll give Danny a chance to tell his wife what happened without—well, it would worry her more if there's a cop with him when he has to tell it."

He nodded and we stood up. That's when Doris caught sight of us and I waved to her and pointed to Danny still seated, and Andrews and I started toward the bar. But halfway there he took me by the arm and started steering at right angles. "Let's go out on the terrace instead. I don't drink on duty and besides the bar's pretty crowded."

It was all right by me, and we went out into the cool darkness and sat down on a concrete railing. We could hear the music from here and I heard Mick O'Neill start what might have been a far out wail and then suddenly butter a large ear of corn; I winced.

"All right," Andrews said. "Tell it your way, what happened."

I told it my way and he listened without interrupting.

When I'd finished, he asked, "How sure are you it was a quarter to nine when Mr. Bushman phoned you?"

"Within a minute or two. I'd just looked at my watch, wondering how soon I could start turning out lights and closing up."

"I guess it checks," he said. "Mr. Bushman happened to notice the time when he got a call from Mr. Drum, half past eight. He didn't notice any times after that, but the first thing he did was to call the club here for a reservation and—"

"Why didn't he ask Tommy to take care of it? Simpler."

"Says he didn't think of it until they'd hung up. Anyway, then he phoned his wife at the party she was attending, a baby shower, and then called you. That would make it a quarter of nine by the time he called you, as near as matters."

"As nears as matters, but what does it matter?"

"Just trying to reconstruct things. Maybe the exact tim-

ing doesn't matter. Neighbor across the hall was watching television when he heard that thud. Thinks it was about the middle of the second half, after the midway commercial break, of a half hour dramatic show he was watching. That would put it between, say, ten minutes of nine and five of nine. Could you have driven from the lot to the Bushmans' place in five or ten minutes?"

"Ten minutes maybe, if I went pretty fast. But I didn't. I closed up the lot first and that took till almost nine. Then, since I didn't speed, it must have taken me at least fifteen minutes more to get out there. But why? You don't think *I* slugged Danny?"

"No, I don't," he said mildly. "Just not overlooking the possibility. After all, you're about six feet tall and two hundred pounds, like he described the man who hit him. And you're wearing a brownish suit and I'll bet you've got a handkerchief."

I had to laugh. I said, "Put on the cuffs, Lieutenant. You've got me cold. But tell me why I did it?"

"His wife, maybe. You were both in love with her once and maybe you both still are. Mr. Bushman told me that—I mean the fact that you both *were* in love with her—when he was telling me how close friends the two of you were. But what if you never gave up?"

I said, "I did give up, but even if I hadn't, what would beating up Danny do me toward taking his wife away from him? That's nutty, Lieutenant."

He sighed. "I guess it is. Does your friend have any enemies that you know of?"

"None that I know of and a buck gets you twenty he hasn't any that I don't know of. A few guys who don't like him too well, maybe, back in the old days—all musicians aren't one big happy family, sometimes we get in one another's hair—but nobody who'd still be carrying a grudge."

"Uh-huh. Does he gamble?"

"Nope. Used to a little, just small horse bets, when we were playing, but he's a reformed character now. We both are."

"Yeah? What are you reformed from?"

"Knocking out my friends and kicking them in the ribs," I told him.

He sighed again. "Well, thanks. Guess I had that coming. Shall we go back?"

When we got inside I saw that the combo had apparently finished the set because all three of them were at the table with Danny and Doris. I wondered for a second if Danny had had time to tell Doris what had happened, then realized he must have had because the combo had played two numbers after Andrews and I had gone out on the terrace.

I stopped Andrews just inside. I said, "Listen, Lieutenant, this is a family reunion, people who haven't seen one another for over a year. If you go asking questions at the table, you'll be a spectre at the feast. How about making that corner of the terrace your office and talking one at a time to whoever you want to talk to, like you did with me?"

"Son, I'm tired," he said. And seeing him so closely in the bright light I saw now that his face did look tired, and older than I'd thought at first. "And it's way past my quitting time. Yes, I'll want to talk to everybody there, but I think it can safely wait till tomorrow."

"Good," I said. "That's best all around."

"Yeah. I don't think there's any more danger. The goon who beat your friend up had him down and out; he could've hurt him worse if he wanted to, so why would he come back for more? But I got one more question for you and the fact that I forgot to ask it out there shows

my brain is through working for the night."

"Shoot," I said.

"Could your friend by any chance be playing around on the side with a woman who might have a jealous husband or lover?"

"No," I said. "That's one vice Danny hasn't got. And believe me, we're close enough that I'd know it if he was doing any philandering. I'd guess it before Doris would."

"You sound sure. All right, I'll buy it. Thanks, Son, and goodnight."

I went back to the table, said hi to Doris and shook hands with Frank Ritchie and Mick. Danny gave me a raised eyebrow and I knew he was wondering what had happened to the cop, so I leaned over and told him.

And that was an end to serious discussion for a while. For the next half hour it was musicians' talk and old home week and a ball. Then the combo had to climb the mountain for another set, and as soon as Tommy started tickling the keys, Doris looked at Danny, "Mind if I dance one with Ralph?"

Danny grinned at her. "You don't really want to dance with him, Honey. You just want a chance to pump him to find out if I told all. Go ahead."

When we were out on the floor dancing, Doris said, "Danny was right, Ralph. I do want to pump you."

"Sorry I'm such a lousy dancer."

"Don't be foolish. You know you're a wonderful dancer or you wouldn't say that. But about Danny—he's not playing this down, is he? I mean, about how badly he got hurt."

"Only some bruises, Doris. That's the McCoy because I got it straight from the doc, not roundabout. But he may be pretty sore in the morning and maybe he shouldn't open the lot. Tell you what, I'll phone around breakfast

time and if he doesn't feel up to it, I'll get to the lot at nine. And if he doesn't feel up to coming in later, it won't hurt me to work the whole twelve hours for once."

"That's sweet of you, Ralph. Do you have any idea who might have done it to him or why?"

"Not a glimmer. Like Danny said when we were talking to the squad car cops, it could have been mistaken identity. Which, in that case, would mean the guy was a professional goon sent to beat up someone he didn't know and knocked on the wrong door or got the wrong building. Either that or the guy was a nut."

"But if he's *that*, what if he comes back again?"

I reassured her on that by repeating the lieutenant's reasoning, that the man had had Danny down and out and if he'd wanted to hurt him any worse, he could have done so there and then, without taking the added risk of making a second trip.

Then to change the subject I asked her if the dress she was wearing was a new one. It was a strapless black velvet that set off her page boy blonde hair beautifully, and I was sure I'd never seen her wear it before.

She leaned back against my arm and laughd up at me. "It's borrowed, Ralph. You don't think I wore an evening gown to a baby shower, do you? After the shower I explained to Winnie what my phone call had been about, and she loaned me this." She added a little wistfully, "It *is* gorgeous."

That was all there was to say and we danced just one number.

We'd scarcely got back to the table when Mick O'Neill came over from the bandstand. He put a hand on my shoulder. "How about sitting in for a number, Ralph boy? Use my sax. I just wiped the mouthpiece and put in a new reed for you."

He slid into a chair. I hesitated and he grinned at me. "G'wan, man, I don't care if you show me up. Ride it high and funky."

Doris put her hand on my arm and said, "Go ahead, Ralph," so I nodded and climbed the mountain. Tommy said, "Hi, man. You name it." "You name it," I said, "and start it. But let me wet this reed first." I wetted the reed and blew a few soft arpeggios, and then nodded.

"All right, *Body*," Tommy said. "I'll take an eight-bar intro and you come in." He swung into a smooth introduction to *Body and Soul*, and we were off.

I took my first chorus reasonably straight, and then started out, not far out but getting farther. Tommy, grinning, gave me a modulation into a new key and a swinging beat, and I found myself and blew. Way out and knowing I'd get back. Tommy looked around at me. "Dig that crazy tenor man," he said. And it sounded good and felt better than it sounded.

Then, when I laid off for thirty-two to give Frank a solo on the skins I looked toward our table and Danny was sitting there alone, and looking beyond I saw Mick dancing with Doris. I hoped Danny wasn't working up a peeve over that. Not that he minds other men dancing with Doris, but it might be different with Mick if Danny still had a grudge against him. But it was probably all right, I told myself, Danny wouldn't hold a grudge that long; it had been three years ago he'd almost had that fight with Mick. I couldn't remember now what it had been about, and like as not Danny wouldn't remember either.

At the end of the number, Tommy tried to talk me into finishing the set; I told him no, but that I'd be out again within a few days and next time I came I'd bring my own sax and I'd sit in a full set, maybe more.

So I went back to the table and sent Mick, who'd just

returned Doris to Danny, back to the combo. Danny said, "Nice going, Ralph," and Doris said "Cool," and I tried to blush modestly.

Danny leaned toward me. He said, "Mick was telling me about Tommy wanting you to join the combo. Why don't you, Ralph? Just while they're playing here, I mean. We could work it out."

"No, Danny," I said. "Remember our promise; we're through blowing for money. Jamming or sitting in, sure. But once one or both of us starts taking jobs on the side, the lot goes downhill. We talked that out and made it definite."

"But this is different. Tommy's a friend of ours and he *needs* a sax. We can't let a friend down. If we trade shifts on the lot so I work evenings—"

I said, "If Tommy was really in a jam, it might be different. But Mick agreed to stick with him till he gets somebody else. And how many in a crowd like this one know the difference? One in thirty, maybe; Tommy isn't going to lose his booking."

Danny shrugged. "If that's the way you feel about it, okay." Which surprised me a little; I'd expected him to give me more of an argument and if he had, who knows? Maybe I'd have let myself be talked into it. You've got to have principles in business, but that doesn't mean you can't weaken a little *once* in a while.

Doris said, "Ralph's right, Danny. You're going to make a go of that business, but only if you both stick to it tight and don't go goofing off."

And that ended any chance of my being talked into playing with Tommy; I'd look like a fool now if I changed my mind.

We had another round of drinks and Danny danced a couple of numbers with Doris and I danced one, and when I brought her back Danny was stifling a yawn.

"Chillun," he said, "I better go, I'm the one that gets up early, and it's pushing midnight and an hour's drive from home."

I told him he was going to be sore in the morning and should let me open up for a change, but he insisted that he'd be all right. But he went along with the idea when I said I'd arranged with Doris to phone at breakfast time to make sure he felt up to working.

He told Doris she could stay and come in with me if she wanted to, but she vetoed that. He asked me to explain things to the boys so they wouldn't have to go over to the bandstand and to say good night for them. "If this was a one-night stand," he said, "I'd buck up and stick around. But they'll be here a month; we'll be out often."

"Okay," I told them, "scram before they finish this number then, because it's maybe the last one, and you'll get tied up if you're not gone. Take care of yourself, Danny. 'Night, Doris."

It *was* the combo's last number, it turned out, so it was lucky they'd made their getaway. The Casanova is an early club in an early town. Most people come for dinner and don't stay too long afterwards, so the entertainment is off and on between six and midnight. The club stays open another two hours, until the legal closing time, for those who want to stick around that long, but they have to entertain themselves.

The combo now adjourned to the table I had all to myself and after I'd explained and excused Danny and Doris for leaving early, we entertained ourselves, talking, until they closed.

Meanwhile, I sold another car, although not on a very profitable basis. Tommy brought up that they were thinking about renting a car for the month they'd be here, since they'd flown in and didn't have any local transportation.

He said one car would do for the three of them, even if they fought over it once in a while. I told them what renting a car for a month would cost them—plenty—and pointed out they'd do better to buy a cheap but usable car and resell it when they took off. I told them we had a '49 Ford on the lot priced at four-fifty and said if they chipped in and bought it for that we'd buy it back at the end of the month for four hundred if they hadn't banged it up any, or for whatever price was fair if they'd damaged it any. They said that sounded swell to them and that they'd be down tomorrow afternoon to look it over and would probably drive it away. We wouldn't make anything on a deal like that, but I knew Danny would back me up on it.

"Where are you boys staying?" I asked. "I'll run you home."

I was mildly surprised to learn that they were staying at a motel—Tommy had to look at his key to tell me the name of it—when they didn't have a car. But they'd intended to rent one tomorrow, so it made sense. They'd seen this one on the way in from the airport in a taxi and because it had a sizeable swimming pool and both Tommy and Mick, especially Mick, liked to swim, they'd had the taxi drop them off there. They'd taken two rooms, Tommy and Frank sharing one and Mick taking the other.

At the motel they tried to talk me into coming in for a nightcap, but I knew that would lead to another hour or two of yak and refused to get out of the car. It was already half past two and I had to get up early to call Danny at breakfast time. But I gave Tommy the telephone number of the office on the lot and told him to call early in the afternoon. If Danny and I were both there I'd probably be able to drop out and pick them up for a look at the car I had in mind for them.

It was three when I got home and I set the alarm for

eight and went right to bed.

When the alarm went off I staggered to the telephone, trying to wake myself up as little as possible, and dialed Danny's number. If he was okay, there was no reason why I shouldn't grab a couple more hours of sleep.

But he wasn't okay. It was Doris who answered the phone and she said, "He's pretty stiff and sore, Ralph. He says to tell you he *can* get down there, but he'll appreciate it if you'll swap shifts today and let him have a few more hours."

"Sure," I told her. "Tell him to come in whenever he feels like it, or not at all. It won't hurt me to do the whole thing one day. Sometime I'll take a day off and get revenge."

"Thanks, Ralph. But he thinks he'll be able to come in by afternoon. Maybe sooner."

"He won't need to let me know," I said. "I'll look for him when and if I see him."

So that ended any chance of my going back to sleep. I took a cold shower to wake up and then shaved and dressed. I remembered my promise to Tommy to bring my own sax when I came out next, and decided that I might decide to do so that evening if Danny came to relieve me, so I put my sax case in the car. I stopped for breakfast en route and got to the lot a little, but not much, after nine o'clock.

It was a dull morning. Not a nibble, unless you could count as such a pair of teen-agers wanting to sell a jalopy. In our business you don't buy jalopies. You *have* jalopies, ones that you've had to take in as trades to sell somewhat better cars, and you're very lucky if you get out of the jalopy whatever trade-in you had to allow on it. So I had to turn the boys down.

A little before noon another jalopy drove onto the lot, and Lieutenant Andrews got out of it. He didn't look as

tired as he had last night but he didn't look exactly cheerful either.

I said, "Sorry, but we can't buy it. Or do you want to trade it in on a better one?"

"Might do that, but not today. Mr. Bushman around?"

I told him Danny was still at home, but might be in later.

"He isn't home. I just came from there. His Missus said he'd left about eleven o'clock. Well, I wanted to talk to her anyway, and I had a chance to do that. Where do you suppose Mr. Bushman might have gone?"

I shrugged. "Some errands, maybe. We're trading shifts today so he isn't due here till one o'clock. Anything new on the matter?"

"Not on our end. Thought maybe after a night's sleep, your friend might be able to remember and tell us something he might have missed before." He took off his hat and wiped his forehead with his handkerchief. "Nobody else has been beat up yet."

For a second I didn't get it and said "Huh?" but I realized what he meant before he went on to explain, "If that was mistaken identity or wrong address, somebody's going to find out he made a mistake."

I said, "Or maybe the right victim won't report it—if he knows he had it coming."

"Could be. You haven't thought of anything to add, have you? Or learned anything new out at that club after I left?"

I told him no to both questions. But then I added, "You said you wanted to talk to the boys in the combo. I drove them home last night so I can tell you where they're holing in—the Cypress Lodge, a motel out on Centralia."

"Thanks. Don't think I'll look them up today, though, if ever. There's no way they could be involved in this

that I can see; they were playing at the club when it happened."

"That's right," I said. "And even if they weren't playing at that moment, there wouldn't be time between sets for anyone at the club to get into town and back again. It's at least three quarters of an hour each way."

"I know." He got back into his car and started the engine but instead of driving off he leaned his elbows on top of the door and looked at me.

He said, "I'll level with you, Son. Unless something new develops, there's nothing more we can do on this case. Especially where the victim can't identify his attacker even if he sees him. If it was mistaken identity and if another beating is reported, then we'll have a lead. If it wasn't—"

He hesitated and I prompted him. "If it wasn't, then what?"

"Then we're still not going to get anywhere unless your friend decides to level with us. If a man gets beat up on purpose, he knows why it happened all right. If, for reasons of his own, he won't tell us that, then we can't help him."

"You've got a point there," I admitted. "Shall I tell Danny you'll be back?"

"No, because I won't. I've got something else to do this afternoon, but it's paper work and I'll be at headquarters. You have a talk with your friend and tell him what I told you, and tell him to drop by and see me, or else telephone, if he wants to add anything."

"Right, Lieutenant," I said.

Danny showed up a few minutes before one, but I didn't get a chance to talk to him right away because I was talking to a prospect at the time. By the time I was free Danny was busy.

Then there was a lull and I was able to tell him about

the lieutenant's call and what he had said.

"Guess he's right," Danny said. "I mean, about there being nothing more they can do about it. And about the fact that if the guy corrects his mistake and beats up the right guy, or already has, it may never get reported to us."

"Uh-huh. How do you feel? Sure you're up to working the rest of the day?"

"Sure. Wouldn't want to climb into the ring with anyone, but nothing hurts any worse when I'm on my feet than when I'm sitting down, so what's to lose working? Any business this morning?"

I told him there hadn't been, but that reminded me to tell him about the deal I'd made—subject to their trying out the car, of course—with the boys in the combo.

Danny approved. "Not much profit if we have to buy it back for only fifty less," he said, "but maybe they won't turn it back. If their next booking turns out to be within driving distance they'll probably decide to keep it. You better run and get yourself some lunch so you'll be free when they call up."

I went to the restaurant across the street and had myself some lunch and when I came back Danny said that Tommy Drum had already called. They were ready.

I hesitated whether to take the Ford—and make one of them drive me back in it if they bought it—or to pick them up in my own car and bring them to the lot. It made sense either way, but I decided on my own car and used it. If we got them on the lot, maybe—if they were solvent enough—they'd fall for one of the better cars instead of the one I'd told them about. By showing them the Ford first I might goof us out of a bigger sale. And a sale it would be, if, as Danny had suggested might happen, they should decide to keep the car and drive to their next booking.

The boys had told me their room numbers but I didn't

know where the rooms were located so I parked in front of the motel and walked back. I came to the number that would be Mick's single first and knocked on the door but there wasn't any answer. So I went down the line a few more doors and knocked again. Tommy's voice called out for me to come in.

Tommy Drum was sitting in a chair reading *Downbeat* and Frank Ritchie was sprawled across the bed busily doing nothing. Tommy said, "Hi, Ralph. Did you bring the Ford?"

"No. Thought I'd take you in to the lot. You might want to look at some others too, before you make up your minds. Where's the Mick?"

"In his room, I guess."

"Isn't," I told him. "I passed his door first and knocked."

Tommy shrugged. "Probably went for a walk like the fresh air fiend he is. Doesn't matter. The three of us talked it over last night after you dropped us off and figured it's a better idea for just Frank and I to buy the car. Mick won't be here the full month if I can get a replacement for him, so he'll just chip in on the running expenses and we'll let it go at that."

"Sounds sensible," I said. "Well, shall we take off?"

"Drink first," Tommy said. "I refuse to look at cars on an empty stomach. Want yours straight, Ralph? Or plain?"

He went to the dresser and poured a shot into each of three glasses, handed them around. I said I didn't want mine either straight or plain and took my glass into the bathroom; I poured about half of it out because he'd made it too big a slug for me to want that early in the day when I'd have to go back to selling cars, and I diluted the rest of it with a couple inches of water.

We sat around with our drinks and Frank said, "Let's kill a little time with these. Maybe Mick just went around the block or something. And even if he isn't shopping on

the car, he'd probably want to go into town with us."

"I didn't knock loudly," I said. "Maybe he's still asleep."

Tommy shook his head. "He's up long since. We got up around ten and he was swimming in the pool then. Told us which way to walk to find a restaurant for breakfast within a block. He was out of the pool when we came back but he wouldn't have gone back to sleep. Mick doesn't take naps."

We batted the breeze about nothing until we'd killed our drinks and then tried Mick O'Neill's door again with the same result I'd got twenty minutes before, and we piled into the Merc and went down to the lot.

They looked at several other cars but finally settled for the '49 Ford; I'd guessed right the first time on how high they'd want to go under the circumstances. They made out checks and I made out the papers and they had a car. They offered to drive one or both of us to the nearest bar for a drink to celebrate the deal, and I told Danny to go, since I'd already had a drink with them back at the motel.

Alone on the lot, I found myself drowning in prospects looking at cars, but as soon as the boys brought Danny back the rush dropped off and there was not much doing.

At five, Danny said, "Why don't you run along, Ralph? I can take it from here."

"Sure you're up to working all evening?"

"Sure I'm sure. I'll probably be ready to sleep by the time I'm through though, so I'll give the Casanova a miss tonight. You going?"

I said, "Think I'll have dinner there. At six, when they start serving. Then maybe sit in with the boys for a few numbers. I've got my sax in the car."

"Have a ball. See you tomorrow."

"Maybe sooner. If I don't spend more than an hour or two at the club, I'll drop by the lot on my way home and see how things are going."

But on the way out to the Casanova I decided I didn't want to eat there after all; I just wasn't hungry enough to do justice to a five-buck dinner. So I stopped at a less expensive restaurant en route and saved myself three and a half bucks by having a lighter meal. It was a quarter after six when I got to the club.

Tommy Drum and Frank Ritchie were playing when I walked in with my sax case; Mick O'Neill wasn't on the stand, or in sight. I started over to them and someone touched my arm and said, "Hi, Oliver. Sit down and have a drink with us." It was Max Stivers, the bookie-racketeer who had bought me a drink last night. The beer barrel shaped Gino Itule was with him again.

I said, "I'd better see the boys first. Hasn't Mick O'Neill shown up yet?"

I had to explain to Stivers that Mick O'Neill was the sax man with the combo and he said no, there hadn't been a sax on the stand yet tonight.

Tommy saw me coming and brought the number to an end just as I got there.

"Where's Mick?" I asked him.

"Don't know. He hasn't shown up. Thank God you got here. I just phoned the lot and Danny said you were on your way and had your sax with you."

I started getting the sax out of the case and putting it together. I asked, "Didn't you stop by at the motel to get him?"

"Sure, and waited around as long as we could without being late ourselves. Then I shoved a note under his door telling him to take a taxi, and we scrammed. Thought maybe we'd find him already out here, but he wasn't."

"You sure he couldn't have been asleep in his room, Tommy?"

"We knocked loud enough to wake the dead, and Mick's a light sleeper. Must have gone somewhere and lost track

of the time. He ought to show up any minute."

"It's not like Mick to be late," I said. "Maybe something happened to him."

"I'm a little worried too, Ralph. But let's run off two numbers and call this a set, and if he isn't here by then—well, we can phone the motel and ask the guy who runs it to use his pass key and look in Mick's room. And—anything else we can do?"

"Phone the police maybe and see if there's an accident report or something. But okay, we'll give him till half past before we try either of those. Want to give *Stardust* a spin?"

We gave *Stardust* a spin, and then *Don't Stop*. But we did stop, despite applause that wanted us to keep on.

"Come on," Tommy said, "we'll use the phone in the manager's office."

The door of the manager's office was ajar but the room was empty. We were hesitating in the doorway when Max Stivers' voice spoke behind us. "Something wrong, boys?"

"We were looking for the manager," I told him.

"Green? He's around somewhere. Shall I have one of the waiters look for him? Or anything else I can do?"

I explained briefly and Stivers said, "Sure, take over his office, use the phone all you want. When you've found out the score, join me at my table, all three of you."

Tommy called the motel first and explained to and then argued with the proprietor. He swore and put down the phone. "Guy won't check the room. Says if Mick's there and won't answer the door it's his business. Says if we call the cops he'll give them the pass key, but he won't use it himself. Guess we'll have to do it that way."

"Let me," I suggested. I was remembering that Lieutenant Andrews had said he had a lot of paper work at headquarters; he might be working late.

He was. I told him what the situation was, listened

to what he had to say. I thanked him and hung up.

"He'll take care of both ends of it," I told Tommy and Frank. "He's right at headquarters so he'll check on accident reports. And he'll have the radio operator instruct the nearest radio car to look in the room. He'll call back as soon as he gets anything."

Tommy sighed. "I can use a drink. I'm getting scared now, Ralph. If it was some guys I'd just figure it didn't mean anything, but not Mick. He'd at least have phoned us."

I took the boys to Stivers' table. There was a third man there whom I didn't know, but Tommy and Frank knew him and introduced him as Harvey Green, the manager. I told about the call we'd made, and Stivers took over again. He clapped Green on the shoulder and said, "You wait in your office for that call, Harv, so the boys can relax and have a drink." And a snap of his fingers brought a waiter running and got us our round of drinks in a lot less time than we could have got them ourselves.

Stivers tried to keep it from being a wake but none of us felt much like talking and he didn't succeed. Mostly we just sat and nursed our drinks until Green came back and said I was wanted on the phone.

I got there fast. Andrews' voice said. "Bad news, Oliver. Your friend Mick is dead."

My mouth felt suddenly dry. "Dead, how?" I asked.

"Murdered. Beaten up like your partner was, but the beating didn't stop there this time. Hit over the head several times after he was down and out. Probably with a blackjack."

"In his room at the motel?"

"Yeah. I think you boys better come down here, all three of you. The Casanova will have to get by without music, one evening. If anybody out there objects tell 'em it's a police order."

"All right. You mean headquarters or the motel?"

"Make it headquarters. I'm going around to the motel now, but I'll be back here by the time you can make it in from there. Or not much after."

He hung up on me before I could ask any more questions. Back at the table I gave it to them straight, without sitting down again. Tommy Drum looked stunned. He opened his mouth, probably to call me a liar or to ask if I was kidding him, then realized I wouldn't possibly be either lying or kidding about something like that, and closed his mouth again.

Frank Ritchie just stood up and said, "All right, what are we waiting for?"

We took my car, going in, because it was faster. I don't know why we felt there was any hurry, but we did. We didn't talk much, except about one thing. Tommy and Frank had known about Danny's being beaten up last night; it had been mentioned at the table, but played down as something that must have been a mistake. Now they wanted details and I told them the little I knew that they didn't.

I drove to the police station and we all trouped in. A sergeant at the desk had been alerted to our coming; he showed us into a kind of waiting room and told us Lieutenant Andrews would be back soon. The chairs were hard and uncomfortable, but we sat on them. And waited.

Frank said, "I don't get it. It must have been the same guy who beat up Danny, but who could possibly have a down on both Danny and Mick?"

Neither of us answered him. And that was all the conversation there was until, after half an hour or so, Danny came in. He looked white and shaken, more worried than I'd ever seen him before.

He told us that Andrews had stopped by the lot on his

way to the motel and had asked him a few questions and then had asked him to come to the station when he closed the lot at nine. He'd stuck around for a while and then decided to close early and head for headquarters to get it over with.

"Did you phone Doris?" I asked him. And he nodded.

Another half an hour and Andrews came in. He put the finger on Tommy first and took him through a door to a smaller office marked *Private*. After a while—I didn't time it—Tommy came back and said the lieutenant wanted Frank next, so Frank went in.

"Are you free to go, or does he want you to stick around?" I asked Tommy.

"Free to go, but where? Nowhere I want to go alone. Maybe when he's through with Frank, he and I can go somewhere where we can have a drink and wait for you guys."

Danny looked at his watch. "May be pretty late when we get through. Here's a thought. Doris is home alone and probably worried stiff. Why don't you go round to my place and keep her company? We can all head there one at a time as the police get through with us here. And there's liquor."

Tommy said it sounded like a good idea but that he'd wait till Frank was through and the two of them could go around together. But he suggested that meanwhile Danny phone Doris and make sure she liked the idea. Danny nodded and went out into the hallway to use a pay phone. He came back and nodded. "She says it's a swell idea."

We gave Tommy the address of the Bushman's apartment and I tried to give them the key to my Mercury, since their car was still out at the Casanova, but he insisted they'd rather take a cab than try to follow directions in a strange town by night, so I didn't insist.

And then Frank Ritchie rejoined us and said Andrews wanted to talk to me next. A minute later the lieutenant was looking at me across his desk. The chair I sat on was even harder and more uncomfortable than the ones in the outer office.

He said wearily, "Let's start with your running through the day for me. Where you were and when."

I started with my alarm going off at eight o'clock and went through it for him.

He nodded when I'd finished. He said, "At least you fellows tell stories that fit together, as far as times concerned. Not that any of you has an alibi this time."

"What time was Mick O'Neill killed, Lieutenant?" I asked him.

"Give or take an hour, around one o'clock. That makes it between twelve and two. It would have been right around two when you knocked on his door. And he could have answered, and asked you in."

"He could have," I said, "but he didn't. But how about Tommy and Frank? Don't they alibi each other? Unless you think they *both* killed Mick."

The lieutenant sighed. "I don't think anything. But no, they don't alibi each other. About half past one, Mr. Drum left Ritchie in their room at the motel and went out to make that phone call to the lot that brought you out there to pick them up. He didn't make it from the motel office because he was out of cigarettes anyway so he walked to a store two blocks off and phoned from there. So he could have dropped in on Mr. O'Neill either going or coming. Or Mr. Ritchie could have done it while Mr. Drum was gone."

He got out a crumpled pack of cigarettes, put one in his mouth and lighted it. He said, "And your partner—he hasn't got an alibi either. He left home at eleven and didn't get to the lot until one. Did you ask him what he

was doing then?"

"No," I said. "It wasn't any of my business."

"I thought you might have got curious anyway. Well, he says he was just driving around thinking. Does that make sense to you?"

"Why not? He sure had something to think about, after what happened to him last night."

"Yeah. Well, he says when he left home at eleven he intended to drive right to the lot and then he got to thinking that there wasn't any point in showing before one, anyway. Says around half past twelve, just before he did come to the lot, he stopped in at a diner and had a sandwich. We can check that, but it doesn't give him an alibi even if it checks because if Mr. O'Neill was killed at twelve, whoever killed him could still have made that diner by half past, or sooner."

I said, "If you think—Listen, it doesn't make sense. Danny is inches shorter than Mick, and fifty or sixty pounds lighter, and Mick was an athlete to boot. You say Mick was knocked unconscious *before* he was killed with a blackjack or whatever?"

"That's right. And I'll admit I can't see your friend Mr. Bushman doing that, especially picking a fight when he himself had sore ribs and a sore jaw to start with."

"And especially when it could not have been because he thought Mick had beaten him up first, last night. Mick was over twenty miles away when that happened, and playing sax in front of a hundred people."

"Yeah. So more likely the same guy attacked both of them. Who might that have been?"

"I don't know," I said. "I couldn't even guess."

"Nor any reason at all why anyone might have had it in for either one of them, let alone both of them?"

"No," I said. "I wish I could help you, Lieutenant, but it makes nuts." I thought a minute and added, "Maybe

quite literally. Last night Danny thought, and I thought with him, that his beating was probably a case of mistaken identity. It's hard to figure it that way now. But our second thought last night—that whoever did it was off his rocker—looks better now than it did then. Nobody could possibly have a sane motive for attacking both Danny and Mick."

"Even a crazy killer would have a motive. One that made sense to him. Could someone have had a grudge against both of them, from way back?"

I said, "It would have to be from way back. There's been no contact direct or indirect between Danny and Mick for longer than the year he and I have been in business here. Probably a year before that would have been the last time they saw one another. That would have been when we were playing with Nick Frazer's band."

"For how long?"

"Danny and I were with Mick for about three months. Mick got taken on two weeks before we left. No connection between his joining and our leaving; we got a better offer, that's all."

"And before that?"

"I'd have to think back to remember times and places but I'd say about three or four times before that Danny and Mick played in the same band, maybe up to two or three months at a time. Always a big band."

"Why always a big band?"

"Any competent musician can read notes and play the arrangements a big band uses. Smaller groups—even small bands, let alone combos—improvise, and when it comes to improvisation, there are different types of musicians. Mick was a Dixieland man, the righteous stuff. Neither Danny nor I swing that way. Did Tommy explain how he happened to have Mick with the combo?"

"Yeah. How did you get along with Mick?"

"Okay. We weren't close friends, but we got along."

"And Danny?"

"They didn't get along very well. But they weren't enemies and neither had anything specific against the other. Just—well, call it a personality clash. Danny can answer that better than I can, and give you reasons, but don't take it seriously because it was nothing serious, believe me."

"I believe you. Mr. Drum tells me he offered you Mick's job last night and you turned it down."

"That's right. Not because Mick would have minded; he wanted me to take it. But when Danny and I bought the lot we decided between us, no more playing. Not professionally, I mean; we sit in on jam sessions once in a while. Or just play together, with Doris on piano."

"She was a singer, wasn't she?"

"Yes. But she plays enough piano to give us a background."

"Going to play saxophone with the combo now?"

I said, "I haven't thought about it."

"Think about it a minute. Won't this make it different?"

"Maybe it will. I doubt if Tommy could get another sax man in town here, even as good as Mick was. He'd probably have to cancel his booking and he's too good a friend for us to want that to happen to. And under those circumstances I'm sure it'll be okay with Danny. In fact, it would have been all right with him if I'd said yes last night, when there wasn't any emergency involved."

"Uh-huh. Well, just one more question, Mr. Oliver. Can you tell me anything at all that even might possibly be helpful, something I might not have asked the right questions to bring out?"

"Not a thing," I said.

"Okay, that's all for now. You're not planning to leave town, I take it. I'll be able to find you on the lot or out at the Casanova."

"Right," I said. "Shall I send Danny in?"

In the outer office I asked Danny if he thought I should wait for him, but he said it would be silly because we each had a car parked outside and couldn't go together anyway.

I found Doris plenty worried and Tommy and Frank both trying to reassure her by telling her Danny couldn't possibly be in any further danger.

"But why," she wanted to know, "was Mick killed? If we don't know that, how can we know there won't be any second attack on Danny?"

Because, I pointed out again and patiently, the man who'd attacked Danny had had him completely at his mercy; if he'd wanted to kill Danny or even injured him any worse than he had, he could have done so then, in perfect safety.

"That's right, Doris," Tommy said. "You know how I dope it? I don't think that cat intended to kill Mick at all, just to beat him up like he beat Danny. Only Danny went down and out from that first sneak punch—and I'm guessing Mick didn't. Mick was big and tough himself and I'm guessing he put up more of a fight. And got the handkerchief down off the guy's face so he knew who was attacking him, see? So when he did kayo Mick, he went ahead and finished the job so Mick couldn't put the finger on him. Makes sense?"

"Makes sense," I said. "Believe me, if I'm next on his list, I'm going to go down for the count without making a grab for any handkerchief. I'd rather be a live coward than a dead hero."

"Me too," Tommy said. "And because we don't know *why* he put the slug on Danny and Mick, we can't be sure we're not on his list too. Say, Ralph, Frank and I

were talking this over on the way here and— Wait, one thing first. You're going to play with us now, aren't you? You're not going to let us down and make us lose that booking, are you?"

Frank said, "It would put us in an awful jam, Ralphie boy. On account that cop ordered us not to leave town, and we'd be strictly on the nut having to stay and not working."

I said, "I want to talk it over with Danny. If he thinks I should—"

"Swell," Tommy said. "Then it's in the bag because I know what Danny'll say. How's about a drink to that? We're ready for another and Ralph hasn't even had one yet. What kind of a hostess are you, Doris?"

Doris laughed and went out into the kitchen to make a round of drinks and Tommy said, "Attaboy, Ralph. Knew you wouldn't let us down. Now here's what we were talking about on the way over here. What kind of a pad you got?"

"Bachelor apartment. Two rooms and a kitchenette I never use."

"Sleep three?"

"If somebody sleeps on the couch, yes."

"Then why don't we check out of the motel and triple up? Big as that guy is, he isn't going to tangle with three of us at once and if we stick together as much as possible it'll be that much tougher for him to dope a way to get at any one of us alone."

Doris came in with a tray of drinks just as I was saying that it sounded like a good idea to me.

We told her what we'd decided and she said it sounded sensible to her.

"And we'll all save money," Frank said. "We chip in on Ralph's rent, natch, but it probably won't come to as much as the motel. What do you pay, Ralph?"

We were still trying to figure out what one third of eighty dollars was when Danny came in. We briefed him while Doris went out to make him a drink. He approved down the line and said that if I *didn't* help the boys out by playing with them, he'd disown me.

And we worked out a schedule for handling the lot. Danny would work the regular shift I'd been working, one o'clock in the afternoon till nine at night. I'd take the shift he'd had, but shorten it at both ends by not opening the lot until ten in the morning—we never did much business the first hour anyway—and working until three or four o'clock, depending on whether we were busy or not. That would give me two or three hours to clean up, rest a little, and go out to the club with Tommy and Frank in time for the combo to start swinging at six. Because I'd be putting in fewer hours than he on the lot, I talked Danny into agreeing to take two thirds of our profits for the next month, instead of half. I pointed out that with what Tommy would be paying me I'd still be coming out way ahead on the deal. Doris backed me up on that, and Danny gave in and said okay.

Tommy decided he'd better call the club and tell them the combo had a new sax lined up, and that they could count on us tomorrow evening. While he was making the call, I asked Danny if the lieutenant, in talking to him, had come up with anything new.

Danny shook his head. "He isn't through with me, though; just called it off because it was getting so late. He's going to come here tomorrow morning to talk some more. Wants to talk to Doris too, or he'd probably have asked me to come back there."

We broke it up just short of midnight. I drove the boys to the motel and waited till they'd packed their stuff, then took them home with me. We made our sleeping arrangements, had a nightcap, and turned in.

That was the end of the second day.

Nothing startling happened for the next week. The investigation brought out some things about Mick that we hadn't known, including the fact that he'd really been stashing his dough during the dozen-odd years he'd been playing. He was more solvent than all the rest of us put together, with bank accounts and stocks and bonds adding up to nearly twenty thousand dollars. We'd talked about chipping in for a funeral for him, but when we learned that, we quit talking about it. Or, for that matter, about having the funeral here. It turned out that both his parents were still living, in Cincinnati. His body was flown there for the funeral, as soon as the police released it. Since Mick had been working with them at the time he died, Tommy and Frank thought they ought to go to the funeral, but since the Casanova manager didn't look kindly on the idea of a second comboless evening, they compromised on letting Frank Ritchie represent both of them; I was able to find them a local skin man who was free and who was good enough to hold down Frank's end of the combo for the one evening he'd have to be gone if he flew both ways. Tommy Drum's piano held the combo together and was irreplaceable so he had to stay. We all sent flowers, of course. Frank came back looking a bit stunned and said he was surprised that a Dixie man could have so many friends. He said cats had come to the funeral from as far away as New Orleans and San Francisco.

Toward the end of the week Danny came out twice and brought Doris, after closing the lot. The second time he brought his trumpet and sat in with us for a few numbers. And we talked Doris into singing a couple of numbers, and the customers really got their money's worth that night.

That was a Wednesday night, and the next night was a Thursday and the night after that a Friday; it was

around half past seven and we'd finished our second set and were sitting at one of the tables. With Max Stivers and his friend Gino; Stivers had invited us over again. Had offered to buy us drinks too, but we'd turned them down except that Tommy Drum had taken a coke. When you're playing till midnight you can't start drinking too early and unless there was special occasion for it, we laid off taking our first drink of the evening until ten or eleven o'clock, when a lift would be welcome to carry us the rest of the way. But we'd sat down with them and were batting the breeze with them. With Stivers, anyway, Gino never said much.

Then there was a hand lightly on my shoulder and I looked up and saw Lieutenant Andrews was standing beside me. He said, "Mind if I sit down?"

The chair next to mine was empty and I said, "Sure, Lieutenant." And then corrected myself. "That is, this is Mr. Stivers' table, so I really shouldn't invite you." I started to introduce them, but Stivers smiled. "We know one another, Ralph. Sit down, Andrews. Drink?"

The lieutenant shook his head. "Didn't know you knew these boys, Mr. Stivers."

"Sure I know them. I hang out here. And like music."

"Do any business with them?"

Max Stivers quit smiling. "Is that any business of yours, Andrews? You're not in your territory here. This is outside city limits, way outside."

"Yeah," the lieutenant said. "Forget I asked."

Stivers smiled again. "But since you did ask, the answer is no. None of these boys are horse players."

"Is their friend, Mr. Danny Bushman, a horse player?"

The smile stayed on Stivers' lips but went out of his eyes. He said shortly, "I've met him. I don't know him well enough to know that. Andrews, is this an interrogation?"

The lieutenant sighed and took a pipe and tobacco pouch from his pocket. "No, it isn't. But I was just wondering. And I'm wondering, too, if Mr. O'Neill was a horse player."

Tommy Drum cut in. "I can answer that, Lieutenant. Mick was down on gambling, all kinds. He wouldn't even match pennies with you."

The lieutenant got his pipe going and didn't ask any more questions, and gradually things got less tense than they'd seemed to be for a few minutes. The conversation got on Dave Brubeck and from Brubeck it got, somehow, to Bix Beiderbecke. Musicians' talk.

I'd just glanced at my watch—Tommy never wears one and he'd put me in charge of keeping time on our breaks —and decided we had a few minutes left before we had to start playing again, when there was another hand on my shoulder and I looked up again. It was a man I knew only very slightly and only by his last name, Hart. He owned a sporting goods store a couple of blocks from the lot and I'd bought a set of golf clubs from him, and once he'd been on the lot and looked at cars, but hadn't bought one.

I said, "Hi," and he said "Hi, Oliver. Don't bother introducing me around; I've get to get back to my table. Just want to ask you one question."

"Shoot," I said.

"Drove past your lot on my way here but didn't have time to stop or I'd have made myself late. But what's the price on that Cad you've got there?"

"Cad?" I said blankly. "There isn't any Cad on the lot. You must've mistaken some other car for one."

"No, this was a Cad all right. I pulled in to the curb and had a close look at it. But I saw your partner was busy with another customer and I'd have made myself late here if I'd waited to ask him. It's a yellow hardtop,

late model, couldn't be over a year old. Looked practically brand new."

I shook my head. "It wasn't there this afternoon, when I left at three o'clock. Danny must have taken it in."

He shrugged and said, "Okay, I'll drop by tomorrow sometime. It's sure a sweet car."

He started to turn away but Lieutenant Andrews' voice said, "Just a minute, Sir." And I realized that everyone at the table had been listening to the conversation.

Hart turned back and said "Yes?" politely to the lieutenant. Since they were going to talk anyway, I said, "Lieutenant Andrews, Mr. Hart."

"Glad to know you, Mr. Hart. Just want to ask this. Could that Cadillac have been a customer's car?"

"Not the way it was parked, lined up with the others. A customer wouldn't drive in and park his car that way. It was between an Olds Rocket 88 convertible and a Buick Special. All three of them look like almost new cars." He turned back to me. "When I drop by tomorrow I want to look at that Rocket too."

"Thanks, Mr. Hart," the lieutenant said.

And then he was looking at me hard, across the table. "Mr. Oliver, was there a late model Buick Special on the lot this afternoon?"

I said, "A Buick Roadmaster. He just got the model wrong."

"Was there on Olds convertible?"

I shook my head.

"All right, let's say he made a mistake on the Buick. Would your partner be likely to have bought *two* almost new, expensive cars in one afternoon without consulting you?"

I said, "It would be unusual, but he's got the authority to. If he got them at a good enough price—"

"Is there enough cash in your checking account for him

to have bought them?"

I said, "They could have been trades. Trade-downs. Sometimes a man has an expensive car but goes broke and needs dough. He'll trade it for an older model and a cash difference. Or they could have been left on consignment."

"How does that work?"

"Well, we don't do this often but sometimes we don't want to buy a car outright for what a customer wants for it but if he wants us to we leave it on the lot and try to sell it for him if we can get enough to give him his price and leave a profit for us. We used to do that oftener when we were first starting and didn't have enough cars to make a good showing on the lot."

The lieutenant said, "Uh-huh," and stood up slowly. "Well, I thought I was through for the day but I think I'll want to talk to Mr. Bushman. And if any of you have in mind to telephone him and warn him I'm coming, it won't do any good. If I find those two or three cars gone off the lot, he's going to have to do a lot more explaining than if they're still there."

He looked around the table to take in all of us, and stiffened suddenly. He snapped at Max Stivers, "Where's your goon?"

"You mean Gino?" Stivers asked blandly. "I don't know. I guess I didn't notice him leave."

"You sent him to—" He broke off and swung around to grab me by the shoulder. "Take me to a telephone."

I hurried with him to the manager's office. The door was closed. He jerked it open without knocking and bolted in; the office was vacant. He hurried to the desk and then swore and held up a broken phone cord. "What other phones—? Never mind, if he yanked this cord, he took care of the others. Son, have you got a fast car and can you handle it?"

"Yes," I said. We were already running out. I saw Tommy and Frank starting after us, but we didn't wait.

I led him to the Merc and Tommy and Frank caught up with us and started to pile in the back seat. Andrews stopped them. "You fellows got another car?"

"Yeah," Tommy said, "but not as fast—"

"Never mind that. Take your car and find the nearest public phone you can use. Don't waste time calling your friend—call the police. Tell them to get cops on that lot *fast*. Tell 'em they may have to stop a murder."

They were running for the car I'd sold them while I got the Merc percolating and gunned it. I asked, "Do you really think—?"

"Don't talk, Son. Concentrate on driving and I'll do the talking. Your night vision's good?"

"Yes."

"Mine's a little under standard. I'll drive as fast as I have to by day, but at night I don't dare go over forty or so, even on a clear road. You go as fast as you think is safe. Don't worry about tickets. If a cop car gets on our tail, that's fine. I'll ask him to go ahead of us and use his siren. And his radio, if he's got one."

Out of the corner of my eye I could see that he'd taken a gun out of a shoulder holster. It was a flat automatic. He worked the slide to jack a bullet from the clip into the firing chamber and then put the gun back in the holster.

"Watch it, Son," he said, as I passed a car with a rather risky margin of safety against a truck coming the other way. "I've got guts, but I don't want them strewn along the highway. And we aren't going to help your partner any getting ourselves killed. Did you notice Gino leave, how long it was before we missed him?"

"Right after Hart came up and started asking me about the Cad, I think."

"Then he's got a pretty fair start on us. You argued with Mr. Hart a while, and then you and I did some yakking. Even allowing him a couple of minutes to pull out telephone cords, he's got at least five minutes start and maybe ten. 'Course we don't know what kind of a car he's got or how well he can handle it. You're doing fine on this one, but don't try it any faster."

I had to slow down a little as we flashed through a block with lighted stores. The lieutenant said, "That's where your friends will be able to phone from. I'd say it's about a dead toss-up whether or not we get there before they get their call through and get results from it."

I said, "You called Gino a goon. Do you think he killed Mick and beat up Danny? But Danny described his attacker as six feet tall and Gino's built like—"

"Don't talk, Son. Yeah, Gino's built short and broad, but he's got power. Used to fight pro, and used to wrestle. Yeah, he's a goon, for Stivers. People who are beaten up by goons sometimes give wrong descriptions, on purpose. We'll worry about that later. It's funny, I knew Stivers was in on a lot of things, but I never thought he had a part in a hot car racket. And I never thought of your used car lot being used to unload them. It's a natural. Now don't run off the road when I ask you this, but are you sure you weren't onto what was going on?"

I said, "I'm still not onto what's going on. Especially how *Mick* figures in on it."

"I'm beginning to get a hunch on that. Well, Son, we're getting close." He took the pistol out of its holster again and this time kept it in his hand. "You don't by any chance have a gun on you or in the car, do you?"

I told him I hadn't. "Then I want you to stay out of whatever happens," he said. "You just pull up and park in front of—"

We were a block and a half away then, and we heard

the shots. Two of them. And we were half a block away when a dark green coupe pulled out of the lot and turned away from us.

It didn't have speed as yet and at the speed we were going I could easily have caught it and boxed it to the curb, but a light turned red in my face and another car pulled out in front of me from an intervening intersection and I had to slam on brakes and barely avoided a smash-up. The screeching stop killed my engine and before I could start it again there was another screeching—of sirens. A car with two men in it slowed down alongside ours, and the lieutenant yelled to them to get the green coupe—and to be careful because there was an armed killer in it. The car took off, siren going and red light flashing, and another like it came from behind us and joined the chase.

"They'll get Gino," the lieutenant said. "He hasn't a chance. We stay here."

I had the engine going again now, and I drove onto the lot.

* * *

It was two o'clock in the morning when a doctor came into the hospital waiting room and told us Danny was dead. He said, "Lieutenant Andrews asked me to tell you that he'll appreciate if you'll all wait here a few minutes. He's on the telephone now, but he wants to talk to you."

Doris was crying softly. She had hold of my hand and was squeezing my fingers spasmodically, so hard that it almost hurt.

Danny had recovered consciousness for a while, and Doris and I had each had a few minutes with him. I don't know what he told her, but he'd asked me to take care of Doris if he died—and I think he knew that he was going to. And he'd made a full statement to the police and had lived to sign it. Anyway, he'd lived longer than Gino.

The green coupe, doing better than eighty, had gone off the road and into a tree when a police bullet had found a back tire. And Pat Stivers was under arrest. The lieutenant had come into the waiting room and told us both of those things before Danny had recovered consciousness.

And now the lieutenant came in again. As he looked from one of us to another—Tommy and Frank were there too, of course—he looked more tired than I'd ever seen him look before.

He spoke to Doris. "Do you want the details tonight, Mrs. Bushman? Or would you rather wait?"

Doris got her sobbing under control and told him she'd rather hear it now.

He said, "Your husband got to playing the horses again; he's been playing heavily for six months now. And he got deeper into debt trying to get out, and Stivers let him do it, gave him credit. As of last week he owed Stivers three and a half thousand dollars. And Stivers decided it was time to close the trap.

"He sent his goon, Gino Itule, to see Mr. Bushman. What happened there wasn't just what your husband told us. Gino wasn't masked and he didn't swing the second he came through the door. He told your husband to see Stivers the next day, and either to bring cash for what he owed or be ready to listen to a proposition about using the used car lot as an outlet for stolen cars until the commissions Stivers would pay him for selling them would cover that debt. Your husband said no to that, and that's when Gino knocked him out and gave him a few kicks to help him think it over.

"When your husband left at eleven the next day he went to see Stivers—and he'd been convinced. But he said you, Mr. Oliver wouldn't go for it and he couldn't risk having the hot cars on the lot even when you were off shift because you often dropped in even when you were

not working, to see how things were going. Stivers had an answer for that. Gino was still around, and with a broken leg you wouldn't be dropping in for a while."

The lieutenant was looking at me now. He said, "Naturally your partner, because he was your friend too, wouldn't agree to that. But he had another answer. He said that if Mr. O'Neill was hurt, maybe a broken arm, badly enough so he wouldn't be able to play saxophone for a month then he was certain you'd not let Mr. Drum down, but would agree to join him.

"So he sent Gino to beat up Mr. O'Neill and what happened there was like we figured. Mr. O'Neill resisted and was strong enough to get the mask down off Gino's face. It hadn't been intended as a murder—till then.

"That scared Mr. Bushman, but it was too late for him to back out. He himself had suggested the beating up and that made him an accessory to murder now. Anyway, he could count on you being away from the lot—and far enough away that you couldn't drop in accidentally—all evening every evening. The stolen cars, three or four at a time, were garaged nearby and every evening after you were on your way to the Casanova, Gino would help drive them onto the lot. And off the lot again at closing time. Your partner had sold three of those cars the first week. Four or five more and his commissions on them would have put him in the clear—or so he thought; I doubt if Stivers would have let him off the hook that easily. But that doesn't matter now.

"The blow-up tonight was when, by sheer accident, someone told you about cars being on the lot that you knew didn't belong there—and told you when I was listening and when Stivers and Gino were there too. Stivers acted quick; he saw right at the start of that conversation what it was going to lead to and whispered quick orders to Gino. But Gino wasn't quite fast enough

to make a clean getaway. If he had, we might have guessed down the line, but we would not have had positive proof."

"I—I think I understand everything now, Lieutenant," Doris said. "Is that all?"

"Not quite. There's something else I think you should understand. Mr. Oliver's part in this. If he hadn't done what he did, Mr. Bushman wouldn't be dead, might not even have got into serious trouble."

I said. "You're crazy, Andrews. What did I do?"

"Nothing, Son. Nothing at all. That's the whole trouble. You *must* have known your partner was gambling again and getting in over his head. Why, when you assured me he wasn't tangled with some other woman you admitted you and he were so much together you'd know something like that even if his wife didn't suspect it. And he wouldn't have been as secretive about horse playing as he would about that, especially from you. And you mean to tell me he could go that far in debt and worry about it without your even suspecting?"

I said, "I knew he was worrying about something, but—"

"And you knew, or guessed, what. When you found him beaten up that night, you knew he was in over his head, and what did you do about it? Try to talk him into leveling with you so you could help him straighten out whatever it was? Or pretend to believe what he told you, so he'd get himself in deeper?"

I said, "I *did* believe it. And why do you think I wanted Danny in trouble. He was my best friend."

"Until he got married, he was. But you were both in love with the same woman, and I think you still want her. And I think that six months or a year from now, except for what I'm saying, you'd be getting her. Son, you figured it that way. Your Danny was weak, you'd probably saved him from getting into serious trouble more than

once since you went to school together. And you knew that if you pretended to keep on being his friend sooner or later his weakness would get him in trouble again and that all you'd have to do was what you did this time—nothing. Am I right?"

"You're *not*. This is slander, Lieutenant. I could—"

"You could sue me, Son, but you won't, because I'm right. You could have stopped things from happening as they did easily, when he first started gambling again. Even after he was beaten up, if you'd talked him into leveling with you. The only trouble he was in up to then was owing money."

Sometime long ago Doris' hand had dropped mine.

The lieutenant said, "And tonight, Son, was the real clincher. You saw Gino leave the table—right after we'd learned that there was a strange Cadillac on your lot. You had more information then than I did; you guessed the truth quicker. So what did you do? You kept me busy and distracted as long as you could, explaining how strange cars could have been taken in as trade-downs or could have been taken onto the lot on consignment. You kept me distacted just long enough to let your partner get killed. And there's no charge I can bring against you."

Doris stood up suddenly. "Thank you, Lieutenant. Thank you very much. Tommy, Frank, will you take me home please?"

They followed, and at the doorway Tommy Drum turned. He said, "There isn't any more combo; I'll cancel the booking. The Casanova manager will send you a check."

The door closed behind them. Definitely.

"Happy, Son?" the lieutenant asked.

"Damn you," I said. "Don't call me Son!"

"You'd rather I use all four words of the phrase, Son?"

CORPSE IN A SUIT OF ARMOR

by Poul Anderson

A little north of Hibbing you are on the edge of the great forests. Behind you lie the iron mines and the memory of iron men in the old days; ahead is a roadless reach of woods, lakes, fish leaping at sunrise and deer between the pines and the ghosts of brown folk who hunted here in the oldest days of all.

But the few hundred people in and arround Two Beavers are working men in a working world. You do not look for romantic irrationalities among them. You most certainly do not look for a knight in full armor.

Sheriff Sworsky blinked at the phone. "Huh?"

The receiver gabbled at him.

"All right, all right, I'll be right over, Mr. Clayborne. And say—" this was to a score of women listening in on the party line—"everybody stay off those grounds, hear me? If anybody comes bothering me and, uh, messing up clues, so help me, I'll run him in . . . Okay, Mr. Clayborne."

He hung up and looked around. Dr. John Koskelainen, who had dropped over for a game of checkers, lifted shaggy brows above his pipe. The sheriff's wife stuck her head in from the kitchen and asked what was the matter.

Bernard Sworsky shook his head, slowly, and his voice dragged out of him. "It's a dead man up at the Clayborne place. Dressed in armor."

"Well, good heavens," said his wife. "Who?"

"He didn't say. You better come along, Doc."

"I always said there was strange goings on at that lodge," declared his wife. "You be back by seven, if you can, or supper will get cold." Her eyes gleamed at the phone and the neighborhood talk which must already be making the lines smoke.

Sworsky gave his sagging belt a hitch and started out the door. Koskelainen trotted after him, a small hook-nosed man with blue eyes and lank brown hair. "Stop by my house, Bernie," he said. "I have to fetch my bag."

"Yeah, sure." Sworsky shook his head again. "Clayborne said he'd been shot. Shot dead. But—"

"I wouldn't trust a layman to recognize death," snorted Koskelainen. "These days, the public thinks a corpse lies laid out pretty with closed eyes. Hollywood!"

Lundquist's general store and post office was next to the sheriff's house, and Ole Lundquist himself collared them in the street. "Hey, Bernie, my wife yust told me—"

"I know. Hope it isn't Loren got killed." Sworsky opened the door of his battered '48 Pontiac.

"The Gravesend kid? No, it ain't him. I saw him couple hours ago, driving sout'. Yust glimpsed him, kind of, going hell for leather. Say, you t'ink maybe—"

"This is no time to think." Sworsky heaved his bulk into the driver's seat.

"That's the motto of this whole damned century," said Koskelainen. He jogged around the car and got in.

Long late sunlight slanted across trees and housetops and the dusty street which was the only one Two Beavers had bothered to name. Sworsky braked at the doctor's home and Koskelainen scuttered inside. There was no one else visible, but as he waited, the sheriff heard a sudden defiant snapping of firecrackers. Some kid must have picked them up in Wisconsin and saved them for today. Hell of a note, fireworks on the Fourth of July when it hadn't rained for three weeks. If it weren't for this damn stiff—Koskelainen came back with his equipment. Dust whirled behind the car as it nosed northward.

"A dead man in armor." The doctor struck a wooden match on his sole and rekindled his pipe. "Appropriate, isn't it? I mean, with Clayborne such an archery enthusiast. I wouldn't be surprised if we suddenly found a moat around his lodge."

"Hell," muttered Sworsky. "Goddam ruts. When're you gonna write that letter to St. Paul? Somebody's got to goose the legislature."

"Come now, Bernie," said Koskelainen. "This case demands the wildest imagination. We must be prepared to wear cloth of gold if necessary, and encounter perilous damosels, and learn that our respected Chicago investment broker Hugh Clayborne is really the Black

Prince snatched out of space and time." He grinned snag-toothed around his briar. "You don't lack a soaring fantasy, my friend; after all, you vote Republican."

"You read too many books," grunted the sheriff. "Sometimes I wonder why you stay in this hick country."

"Well, I like the fishing. And Clayborne was always fun to talk to. I'll be very sorry if it turns out that he murdered this unknown knight."

"Damn! It just now hit me. Young Gravesend barreling out of town, two hours ago."

"Hm, yes, there is that. And, of course, Clayborne broke his arm last week. I set it myself." The doctor scowled. "But Loren Gravesend—a skinny little playboy from Chicago's Gold Coast—I can't see it."

They had only about a mile to go till they reached Clayborne's summer lodge. Sworsky turned right and followed a graveled driveway, a better surface than the public road, through a well-manicured lawn.

The house was long and low, built of carefully trimmed logs and carefully undressed stone. Its main entrance faced the driveway; the rear door, opposite, opened directly on the forest, whose border marched straight north for a hundred yards to the edge of the property. There the trees ran wild again, back to meet the road. To Sworsky's left, where the woods enclosed the northeast corner of the lawn, stood a target, vividly red and blue against darkling green.

Clayborne stepped out the front door as the car pulled up. He was a tall, quiet man with thick graying hair. His clothes were fashionably but inoffensively outdoor-type. His right arm, heavily bandaged, hung in a sling.

"Hello, sheriff," he nodded. "Hello, John." There was whisky on his breath, and the face was colorless.

"Where's this dead man?" Sworsky scrambled out of the car. Evening shadows lapped his feet.

"Right this way." Clayborne started across the lawn. "I was indoors this afternoon. Went looking for him and—Terrible." He shivered.

"D'you know who it is?"

"Oh, yes. Henry Schmitt. My partner. He came down for a visit and—" Clayborne bit his lip. "We've been partners for twenty-five years. I never thought—"

They crossed by the target. It was painted on a short fence of twelve-inch-thick pine posts. Clayborne entered the woods behind it, parting the brush with the casual soundless ease of many years. He had built the lodge a decade ago and spent most of his vacations there.

A few yards inside the forest, there was a brighter gleam among the sun-flecks.

Koskelainen stooped over the body. Metal sheathed it from head to toe, a complete set of fourteenth-century French plate armor, probably—he thought—for tilting. The helmet gaped open and the middle-aged face that stared out was assuredly dead. There was a neat round hole in the head.

"Gone," he nodded after a routine check with mirror and fingers.

"I . . . I threw back the visor," said Clayborne. "It was obvious that— Otherwise I haven't touched anything."

"Your partner, huh?" said Sworsky. "How'd it happen?"

"I don't know, I tell you. Henry was visiting me—he went outside, and after several hours I began to worry and—"

"He went for a stroll in that tin suit?"

"Yes. He was quite a medievalist, you see. His hobby . . . he must have read every historical novel ever laid in the Middle Ages, and owned some weapons and—He got this suit from a New York agency two or three

weeks ago . . . that is, he ordered it, though it wasn't delivered till a few days ago—" Clayborne shrugged. "Excuse me. I'm not myself."

"Gimme a hand here." Koskelainen was tugging at the body. "Blasted armor weighs a ton," he grumbled.

Sworsky stooped and helped him roll it over. Iron rattled horribly. The same small hole was punched through the back as through the breastplate. Koskelainen felt its edges. "Yes," he said. "Bent outward. The slug went in the front and came out the back, probably tore right through the heart. It may have taken him a few minutes to die, of course. Such wounds are seldom instantly fatal."

"Well—" Sworsky stood up and scratched his head, feeling helpless. He had only encountered one murder in his life, and that was a straightforward drunken stabbing. Just what did you do, anyway? He tried to remember the stories in the detective magazines. "Well, who could have killed him?"

"It must have been an accident," said Clayborne. Self-possession was returning, his straight brown face looked more thoughtful. "Henry didn't have an enemy in the world, as far as I know. Maybe some kid, shooting for fun."

"Nobody for miles around has kids that age," snapped Koskelainen. "And anyhow, if a person wants to go squirrel hunting around here, or try to bag a deer out of season, he's got his own woods to do it in."

"Well," said Sworsky. "Well, we better get him back to the house, hadn't we?"

"Be quite a job," said the doctor. "Let's get this junk off him. You know how it's put together, Hugh?"

"No. I'm an archer, not a would-be knight errant—Sorry. Hell of a thing to say." Clayborne squatted and groped at the metal with the awkwardness of a

strongly right-handed man forced to use his left. Koskelainen snored and brushed him aside.

"Let me. I can figure it out, I suppose. Helmet . . . yes, and the gorget attaches, and then the palettes—" His small brisk fingers got to work.

"I didn't know you was an expert on armor, Doc," said Sworsky.

"Well, I've amused myself with reading history, and that plus a little common sense and a few tools out of the bag— Don't bother me."

"Who else is at the lodge?" asked the sheriff.

"Just myself," mumbled Clayborne. "And Henry . . . my wife is visiting her relatives in Detroit this month, took the kids along, and Henry . . . Mr. Schmitt was a bachelor. You know I don't keep servants here."

"How about the Gravesend boy?"

"Oh . . . oh, yes. He had to leave today." Clayborne looked confused. "I saw him off about two hours ago."

"Interesting," murmured Koskelainen, peeling off a delicately fluted tuille. "Judging from the extent of blood clotting, I'd say at a guess your friend has been dead for some two hours."

Sworsky felt a primitive tingle along his back. "And the kid was driving like a bat out of hell through town, headed south, a couple of hours ago," he added slowly.

"Now wait." Clayborne lifted a shaky left hand. "Loren . . . he had to leave, I tell you. He just had to leave. That's all there was to it."

Armor plate clashed at their feet. Schmitt had worn padding beneath, and under that was a nylon T-shirt and shorts. They seemed grotesquely out of place. Stripped down so far, the slain knight was a pitiful small corpse with limp belly and knobbed knees. Koskelainen examined the chest wound. Whatever killed the man had gone through with terrific velocity, to make

so little and clean a hole.

"I kind of thought knights was bigger than that," said Sworsky.

"Oh, no," replied Koskelainen. "Not as a rule. Average height in the Middle Ages was well below the modern. What d'you expect, with a diet of bread and salt fish and meat on feast days?"

"But how the hell could he even walk in that outfit?"

"He could . . . slowly and clumsily. The French at Crécy, among other incredible blunders, actually dismounted and attacked on foot at one stage. It cost them the battle." Koskelainen got the last plate off and squatted for a moment, looking into the lightless eyes. Poor Henry Schmitt. An aging bachelor in a Chicago office, living out his dreams through books. He'd never even come to his partner's lodge and tried for a muskie—till now— "I suppose," remarked the doctor, swabbing off the worst of the uncleanness of death, "he was a steady customer at the Ivanhoe?"

"Why, yes." Clayborne was surprised. "How did you know?"

"Fits his character. The Ivanhoe is a first-class restaurant and a lot of fun, but you'd hardly call it an authentic medieval atmosphere—unless all you know about medieval times is taken from bare-bosomed historical novels. Well, let's get him indoors, God rest him."

Sworsky took the shoulders and Koskelainen the feet. Clayborne picked up the doctor's bag and led the way out onto the lawn. A hundred feet from the target, something else glistened. "What's that?" asked Koskelainen.

"Oh . . . over there? I don't know," said Clayborne. "Come on, let's get inside and I'll break out the whisky. I think we all need it."

Koskelainen grunted, set down his burden, and

stumped across the lawn. Sworsky saw him pause and look down. Then he waved.

The sheriff joined him. There was a rifle lying on the grass, as if it had been thrown toward the woods and the thrower hadn't quite made it.

"'Ware the fingerprints," said Koskelainen sardonically.

The other man bent over. ".220 Swift," he said. "Using hard-nosed bullets, I suppose it would punch right through a man in armor."

Clayborne approached. The lowering sun blazed a halo behind him, they could not see his face, but his tone was thin: "One of mine. I use it for target shooting, mostly."

"You couldn't use it with a busted arm," Sworsky straightened. "So who did? Why did Gravesend take off?"

"I don't know, damn it!"

"I think you do, Mr. Clayborne. It'll be better if—"

The tall man sagged. He stared at the rifle shining on the grass.

"All right. It was an accident. He panicked and . . . I guess I did too. Loren Gravesend's father was one of my closest friends. I couldn't let his son go to jail for—"

"I thought Henry Schmitt was also a friend," said Koskelainen.

"Of course, of course. Shut up, will you? I'll give you all the facts you want, but let's get Henry into the house." Clayborne's tone was raw. He turned and walked stiff-legged back to the body.

Sworsky picked up the gun in his handkerchief. As he went to his car and laid it on the seat, an elderly Ford chugged up the drive. Sworsky's voice drifted back, heartily damning all sightseers and ending up by deputizing the newly arrived trapper to keep others off the

premises. After all, he played poker with the man now and then.

Returning, he helped Koskelainen carry Schmitt inside. They stretched the body on a bed—no rigor mortis yet—and drew a sheet across it. When they re-entered the living room, Clayborne was trying to unstopper a bottle of Scotch with his teeth.

"Damn arm," he said. A measure of ease had come back, and he smiled. "You do the honors, John."

Koskelainen nodded curtly, setting out glasses, ice, and soda. He had often visited here. Clayborne was one of the local rarities who could talk about something besides weather, crops, and tourists.

The room was big, with oak rafters across the ceiling, a stone fireplace, comfortable furniture. There were a few heads on the walls, deer and moose. Several guns were racked in one corner; Koskelainen noticed the empty place where the Swift had been. Nearby hung a collection of bows, from a lady's toy to a huge hundred-pound longbow. There was also a set of arrows for each; two sets for the big fellow: shafts tipped with sharp points for target practice and others with the murderous broad head of the hunter.

"All right, Mr. Clayborne." Sworsky took his drink and sat down. Clayborne remained standing, Koskelainen tamped his pipe and prowled the room. "I guess I can't blame you too much, but you'd better give me the straight story now."

"I will. I was a damned fool, of course. It's simple enough. Loren wanted to do some shooting this afternoon, but he was still in the house listening to a ball game on the radio when Henry and I went out. He, Loren, wasn't interested in the armor. Henry wanted to try walking around in it, learn how it felt to be a knight . . . you know. Later on he was going to hire

a horse and—" Clayborne smiled, a sad little smile. "Anyhow, we went out into the woods. Henry was moving very slowly, of course, and had to stop to rest every so often. We came to where . . . where you saw him, and he was standing and resting when I heard the shot. Henry pitched over—dying—he was already unconscious, I saw him die, and meanwhile poor Loren was banging away at the target, I heard him . . . So I came out and told him what had happened. He was in an absolute panic. I was pretty shaken myself. You understand. All I could think was, he ought to get away. He took his car and I went back into the house and . . . had a few drinks, I guess. I'm not very clear about it. Nightmare. Finally I called you."

"It was an accident, then?" asked Koskelainen. "Nothing criminal about that. Why should Gravesend panic?"

"He just did. You know Loren. Inherited money, night life, shy skinny boy . . . nice kid, though, in spite of everything. Nothing like that had ever happened to him before. Hell, you know how rattled *I* was."

"Uh-huh." Sworsky rubbed his chin. "Clear enough. I don't know if I even ought to have the boy picked up. We'll need him for a witness, of course, but—I don't know. What do you think, Doc?"

"Better do so," advised Koskelainen. "This business is not at all clear, in spite of what Hugh says."

"Huh?"

"That target is backed by a foot of solid pine. How could a bullet get through and kill Schmitt on the other side?"

"I think—" Clayborne nodded to himself. "Yes. My fault. But I'd forgotten about it. There's a three-inch crack in the fence. Two of the posts aren't placed quite side by side. It's so far off the target area that I never gave it a thought . . . I'm a better shot than that, with

gun or bow, and use a straw butt for arrows anyway . . . Well, I suppose Loren's first slug flew wild, just happened to go through that crack—"

"Possibly," said Koskelainen. "And now the body has been moved, so we can never be sure just how possible it was. So much for amateur detectives." He stopped his pacing and blew tobacco clouds. "I'd like to have a look at that fence, though. You might call up meanwhile, Bernie, and get the coroner here. And alert the state police for Gravesend."

Clayborne gave the doctor a quizzical glance. "'So much for amateur detectives,'" he quoted.

Koskelainen grinned and went to the door. Clayborne paused to identify Gravesend's car for the sheriff and then followed.

The sun was behind the trees now, but there was enough light. Clayborne pointed out the gap in the fence, a yard from the painted target. Koskelainen squinted at it. "Looks like those two posts were pried away from each other,"he said. "Marks here in the wood, a crowbar?"

"Could be," said Clayborne. "You remember I hired a man this spring to do the rough work of cleaning up here." The doctor's head moved squirrel-like. "What're you looking for, John?"

"Bullet holes around the crack. I don't see any. They're all in the target or its immediate vicinity. If Gravesend was that good a shot, why should he miss so badly the first time?"

"I don't know, unless . . . Wait a minute! You're not implying—"

Koskelainen's short body turned around and his voice fell bleak: "Did Gravesend stand to gain anything by Schmitt's death?"

"Why . . . well . . . well, I believe Henry left him a bequest. He, Henry, was quite fond of Loren, too. But—"

"Perhaps we'll find that Gravesend has less money of his own than you realize. Didn't you mention something about Schmitt getting married, the day I came up and fixed your arm?"

Clayborne nodded. "Poor old Henry finally tumbled," he said. "Or, rather, I think he was often in love, but too shy—you know the type. He finally met the right girl, though, and they planned to be married next month. It won't be any pleasure telling her about this."

"So I imagine she'd have inherited everything from him after the marriage, when he got around to changing his will," said Koskelainen unsentimentally. "Your share of the partnership, Gravesend's bequest— It could have been done on impulse, you know. Gravesend comes out on the range, hears Schmitt clanking through the woods, jumps up on the crossbar here and looks over the fence— If he could pass it off as accidental, well, figure it out for yourself."

"I don't believe it," said Clayborne. His tone was sharp.

"Just speculating. *I* find it hard to believe that he could miss by a yard the first time and put every succeeding bullet inside the circles. It's possible, of course, but most improbable."

They started back toward the house. A wan breeze gusted in the pines. " 'The improbable is not to be confused with the impossible,' " recited Clayborne. " 'Every imaginable concatenation of events, including those of the actual world—' "

" '—is most improbable; reality is a state of low entropy," finished Koskelainen. People who have read Haeml are so few that it had endeared him and Clay-

borne to each other.

"By the way, I never did see that gizmo that broke your arm," he added. "Still have it?"

"Yes. In the garage. Damn fool thing to do. This seems to be my time for pulling fool stunts."

"I'd be interested—and say, who wrapped all that pretty white gauze around your splint? That's not my style."

"Oh, it was beginning to look dirty," said Clayborne. "I didn't want to bother you about it, so I just wound this strip on myself."

"Hm. Better let me re-do it. Hate to have people think I'm that sloppy."

"Not just now. Here, want to see my gadget?" Clayborne opened the garage door. Besides his station wagon, there was a workbench inside, with a thing of vises and screws on top of it. "A Chicago outfit built it to my design. I had what I thought was an original idea for making my own bows. Put the ends in these clamps here, pull this lever to bend the stick. All I did was catch my own arm in it and—snap!"

"Hell of a design," grunted Koskelainen. "Better adapted to breaking ulnars than bending wood."

"I'm not much of an engineer. Found that out all right." Clayborne smiled. "I was lucky to have a clean fracture."

"Yeah. Well, I'll fix up that wrapping for you again."

"Never mind, I said. I'll come see you tomorrow or sometime. Let's go back in, it's getting chilly." Clayborne opened the door into the house.

It was gloomy within till he snapped on the lights. Sworsky was still on the phone. Clayborne and Koskelainen sat down on a couch and resumed their drinks.

"I'm going to miss Henry," said the broker. "He was such a decent little guy. And the first time I persuaded

him to come up here and get some fresh air, what happens?"

Koskelainen scowled at his pipe, not liking the thought that was growing inside him.

"Do you think Loren will get in any real trouble?" went on Clayborne anxiously.

"I'm no lawyer," said the other man with a note of irritation. "At the very least, he's guilty of leaving the scene of an accident, but I don't imagine that'll cost him more than a fine. At the worst, though, he's a murderer."

"But—damn it, John! I saw him, you know, when he learned. Ripped up inside, as if the bullet had gone through his own body. I've known him all his life, and he isn't that good an actor."

"A murder done on impulse must leave you rather excited for a while," said Koskelainen dryly.

"But—"

"Look here." The doctor's knuckles whitened where he held the bowl of his pipe. He looked straight through Clayborne and spoke in a high, rapid tone. "I have to do some pretty rough things now and then. D'you think I enjoy lancing a child's eardrum? Stuffy as it sounds, I also believe in civic duty." He clamped down hard on the stem. "If murder has been committed, and I suspect it has, I've got to do what I can to find the killer."

"The police—"

"Police be damned! One reason the Almighty State is swallowing us up today, Hugh, is that we delegate too many of our own jobs to it. Now about this killing, I have a notion that it was not an accident. I could be wrong, but I'd like to check the facts. Would you answer some questions?"

"Of course." Clayborne leaned back with an indul-

gent expression.

"Whatever you tell me may have to be checked."

"Sure. I'm not covering up for Loren, I see now I was an idiot to try it. If he killed Henry on purpose, I want to know too."

"Good. Now then. When did you invite Schmitt and Gravesend to visit you here?"

"Oh . . . about the middle of last month. I suggested they drive up for the Fourth of July and spend the rest of the week."

"And then you came here yourself?"

"On the twenty-first. Wanted to get the place in order and so on. I broke my arm on the twenty-fifth, if you remember."

"I do. And you left the next day."

"Had business in New York. Interrupted my vacation for it. But what has all this to do with—Henry?"

Koskelainen sighed. "I'm trying to establish whether this was a planned or an impulsive murder—or, of course, an accident. Okay. You took a bus to Hibbing, being unable to drive, and chartered a plane to Minneapolis; that's what you told me you were going to do."

"Right. Caught a New York plane there. Did my business and returned over Chi on the thirtieth. I spoke with Henry and Loren over the phone, from the airport, then flew to Duluth and caught a bus to Two Beavers. Been here since then, mostly loafing. I like to be by myself."

Koskelainen made an elaborate affair out of rekindling his pipe. "I see," he nodded when he had it going again. "Now just what did Schmitt and Gravesend say to you over the phone?"

"Well . . . Henry said his armor had arrived on the promised date and he was going to bring it with him."

"That's what puzzles me," said the doctor. "I can see why Schmitt would want to try on his suit, but why bring it way to hellandgone up here?"

"I told you he was a romantic," said Clayborne. "He didn't favor me with the details, but can't you just see it? Walking in the greenwood y-clad a coat of mail—"

Koskelainen smiled sourly. "That *would* be the phrase he'd use, wouldn't it? He'd hardly stop to think that a coat of mail referred to chain mail . . . All right. Let's go on with it. When did he say he'd arrive, and when did he actually do so?"

"Same time in either case. Yesterday evening, just as planned."

"Now how about young Gravesend? Arrived with him?"

"Yes. They took Loren's car, and he, Loren, drove all the way. Then he went into town for a few beers. You can ask whoever saw him there whether he seemed nervous or not. He didn't to me."

"Wish I were young again," sighed Koskelainen. Then, after a moment: "No. I wouldn't want to be that helpless. But it would be nice to have my twenty-year-old physique back."

He sat for a moment, thinking. Clayborne sipped his drink. Sworsky finished his calls and walked over.

"Coroner'll be along," he said. "I got the highway patrol looking for Gravesend." He sat down and considered his watch. "Guess we have to stay here. I'd better call my wife too and tell her I'll be late."

Gravesend chuckled. "She's doubtless heard it already on the party line," he answered.

Koskelainen stood up. "I want another look at the body," he said harshly. "And you'd better fetch in that armor."

"I s'pose." Sworsky sighed his way back onto his feet. "I'll get Jim to help me. Guess he's been guarding the driveway long enough to rate a look at our clues."

The floor creaked under his tread. Staring out the window, Koskelainen saw him speak to the trapper and saw the two men enter the woods. Darkness ate them.

"You have a magnifying glass?" he asked Clayborne.

"Yes. Somewhere."

"Find it." Koskelainen went into the bedroom and closed the door behind him.

Schmitt was cold and stiffening. The doctor probed the wound from both sides. Wiping away clotted blood, he regarded the small round holes and clicked his tongue.

Well, rest in heavenly castles, Henry Schmitt, and may King Arthur make you welcome. Koskelainen closed the eyes and weighted them with quarters. He wished he had some older coins.

The bathroom adjoined, and he went in and washed his hands and ran a pocket comb through his hair. The mirror showed him a tired face, beginning to age just a trifle.

By the time he returned to the living room, Sworsky and the trapper, Jim Thorson, had brought in the dismantled armor. It lay on the floor in a somehow pathetic heap. Clayborne was offering Thorson a drink and finding ready acceptance. The sheriff sat down and brooded at his own glass.

"Don't know why we have to wait around like this, John," he complained. "Just an accident, and my supper's getting cold. I hate warmed-over food."

"If it's any consolation to you, this was no accident," Koskelainen told him. "D'you have that magnifying glass, Hugh?"

"Here you are, Sherlock," said Clayborne.

Sworsky sat upright. "What the hell?" he asked.

Koskelainen hunkered on the floor and studied the breastplate. "Come have a look," he invited.

"All you Finns are crazy." The sheriff got down on his hands and knees. "What's this all about?"

"Yeh, you big Polack, do I have to write it out for you? Or can you even read? Look here. The missile went through the front, you can see where the metal was punched inward, and came out through this what-you-call-it fastened on Schmitt's back. It was moving in a devil of a hurry, too."

"Well, a .220 Swift has a muzzle velocity of—"

Koskelainen peered through the lens, nodded, and gave it to Sworsky. "I don't see any bullet traces," he said. "You'd expect some lead to be scraped off, wouldn't you?"

"Not necessarily," said Clayborne, looking down at them. "Those were hard-nosed bullets I had for that gun."

"Oh, well, never mind." Koskelainen rose, dusting shabby trousers. "Where's my pipe?—Ah, here— Whatever the microscope shows, or does not show, I know damn well that it wasn't a bullet killed Schmitt."

"What do you mean?" Sworsky stood up too, looking bewildered. Clayborne snapped expressionlessness down over his face. Thorson kept on drinking.

"There are a lot of accidental gun wounds around here, and I see nearly all of 'em," said Koskelainen. "A bullet like that, going through a man, is rather messy. Neat little hole at the front, sure, but a ripped-out place big enough to put your fist in where it emerges."

"Say . . . say, yes." Thorson put his glass on a table. "I seen that on deer."

"I'm not so sure," said Clayborne.

"We can test it," said Koskelainen. "Not that it would

ever have occurred to the local authorities to do so, but there are so many things in this case that just don't fit that I think we ought to call in a ballistics expert."

"What things don't fit?" inquired Swosky.

Koskelainen explained the matter of the gap in the fence. "It's too improbable that Gravesend would shoot so badly that *one* time," he finished. "Add to that the peculiar wound, and I think there's only one answer. Schmitt was killed with a strangely appropriate weapon . . . a cloth-yard arrow."

There was a stillness.

"Are you crazy?" whispered Clayborne. "He was wearing *armor!*"

Koskelainen knocked out his dottle and took forth his tobacco pouch and began filling the bowl afresh. It was no way to treat a good pipe, but he needed it very badly. "You know better than that, Hugh," he said with a great gentleness. "You're an archer. You know what a hundred-pound bow can do to a deer. Or read your history. Why d'you think the English longbowmen were so effective against the chivalry of France? Because they could put a shaft right through a man in full armor! It's been tested. An oak fence post was draped with quilting and medieval armor one time, a number of years ago, and shot at. The arrow came out the other side of *that!*"

"Well . . . well, yes." Clayborne smiled, shakily. "Sorry, I wasn't thinking. You're right, of course."

Koskelainen struck a match. He peered over the pipe as he inhaled it to life. "Now accidental gunshot death is all too common," he said, "but I can't believe in a man being accidentally killed by an arrow in this day and age. It was murder."

"Wait a minute!" Almost, Sworsky yelped. "You mean the kid borrowed Mr. Clayborne's big bow there and

shot Schmitt with it?"

"I do not," said Koskelainen. "I've never drawn a bow, but I have read history . . . and talked with you, Hugh. I doubt if a little fellow like Gravesend could even bend that hundred-pounder, let alone shoot it with such murderous accuracy." He dropped into a lecturing tone, aware that he was stalling off a moment which would hurt. "The medieval English law required every yeoman to own a bow and spend a certain number of hours each week practicing. Why? Because it's a difficult weapon. You need years to become any good with it. After Crécy, the French kings tried to raise a similar corps, but never had any luck; France lacked that tradition of archery from boyhood on." He put his match carefully in an ashtray. "You know," he remarked, "that was why the long bow went out of use. It was as deadly as the crossbow, more deadly than the early muskets, and had a higher rate of fire than either. But any fool could learn in a few weeks to use a crossbow or a musket. It took too long to train a man to the gray goose feather."

"All right," said Thorson impatiently. He took another gulp of Scotch. "So who killed this guy?"

Koskelainen sighed. "An expert," he answered. "And one whom Schmitt trusted, because Schmitt was shot from the front."

Clayborne scowled. "I don't—I have a number of friends in a couple of archery clubs," he said uncertainly. "But as far as I know, none of them are anywhere near here, or have any motive."

Koskelainen wandered over to the arrow racks. "One of the target-shooting shafts was used, of course," he said. "The hunting arrows would have made a broader —and unmistakable—hole. Ah . . . yes, the point on this one looks rather blunted. It's been wiped clean, but

I daresay a microscope will show blood-flecks in the feathers."

"For God's sake, will you come to the point?" growled Sworsky.

"I suppose I must." Koskelainen spoke so low that they could barely make out his words, and he stared at the floor. "Consider Henry Schmitt. A romantic medievalist, but with no background of scholarship whatsoever. *He* doubtless thought an arrow would bounce right off armor of proof. He wanted to dress up in such a tortoise shell and see what it felt like to be shot at in the brave days of old. He must have mentioned his idea to you, Hugh, when he first learned he could get his armor . . .

"It was easy enough. You arranged matters so that Loren Gravesend would be using the rifle this afternoon—the bare suggestion would do it, and if he was listening to the radio as you said, you would even know the approximate time he would come out. And meanwhile you walked with Schmitt, in the woods behind the target, where Gravesend couldn't see you . . . and after it was done, you hid the bow and arrow. When he thought he had killed the man, Gravesend went hysterical and you had no trouble getting him to flee. The resulting hullaballoo, foreseen by you or not, ought to have provided a nice smelly red herring and, incidentally, given you time to clean up any loose ends you might have overlooked. Such as this blunted arrow—"

Clayborne set his glass down and walked slowly toward the doctor. "Are you crazy, John?" he breathed. "You tell me how a one-armed man can use a bow."

"That was ingeniously thought out, too." Koskelainen would not meet the broker's eyes. He drew on his pipe and grimaced as if at a foul taste. "That apparatus of yours *was* designed to break an arm, a nice clean simple

fracture, and I was meant for a witness to your condition. It took guts to do that.

"However—"

Clayborne looked at Sworsky. "Do you think he feels all right?" he asked.

The sheriff took a pack of cigarets from his shirt pocket. His fingers were not quite steady. "Let the little guy finish, Mr. Clayborne," he said.

"I thought you were my friend, John."

"I was," said Koskelainen. "I am. Don't interrupt me. please. I'd like to get this over with." Suddenly he glanced up and locked eyes with the tall man. "Can I have a look at your arm?"

"What?"

"If it is really immobilized, then of course I'm wrong and I'll beg your humble pardon. Let me take those wrappings off."

Clayborne looked around. "No," he said. "I don't trust you. You might be delirious and—"

Koskelainen shrugged. "No matter. Let me continue, then. It so happens there is a way in which a simply fractured limb can be made perfectly useable. It requires the facilities of a large clinic . . . such as can be found in New York. Your trip east was for that purpose. The doctor there made an incision, put a stainless steel nail in the bone, sewed up the flesh again . . . it's more complicated than that, actually, but there's the upshot of it, and your arm is now as good as it ever was. I'll be able to identify the scar of the operation, Bernie, and we can get his arm X-rayed and check the New York clinics—"

Clayborne stepped back from him. Sworsky stood with arms dangling loose, wishing he had a gun along and thinking that the reason he didn't was that it would have looked too foolish.

Koskelainen went on: "I have to reconstruct the sequence. I could be wrong here and there, but Gravesend's testimony—now that we have no preconceptions to discount it—will check me up. You stopped at Chicago on your way back here and called him and Schmitt, confirming that they would arrive as planned. Either then, or privately when they did come, you explained to Schmitt about your arm and told him you'd take him out as he wanted and shoot an arrow at him. But on pretense of arranging a surprise or a practical joke or something, he was not to tell Gravesend about your operation.

"Your deliberately bungled attempt to cover up for Gravesend was, of course, only intended to make things look worse for him. But it didn't really matter whether he was found guilty of murder or only of accidental killing. It didn't even matter if investigation showed an arrow had done the job, though you considered that improbable. In every case, you, with your broken arm, would be assumed innocent.

"You resplinted it yourself before calling us, and figured to wear your sling the usual length of time. If you made a short visit elsewhere in the next few days, then, when I saw the scar, you could explain it to me as another accident treated by some other doctor. And you would get Schmitt's share of a prosperous business.

His pipe had gone out again, but he didn't bother to light it. He took it from his mouth instead, and turned it over and over in his hands.

"I'm sorry, Hugh," he mumbled.

Clayborne wet his lips. "Sheriff—" he began.

"Better let the doc have a look at your arm, if you're innocent," said Sworsky. "You know, Mr. Clayborne, you are the only one around here who could use that bow."

Clayborne backed away. Sworsky and Thorson moved in on either side of him.

They were both big men, very big men.

Koskelainen sat down by the window and looked out at the fading day.

PILL ROLLER

by James E. Gunn

DAN says I am wasting my time, but I want you should know the truth about Benny.

With everything what's been said and written, it's time you learned the real story and why you can't get Topsies any more. Because the real loser is you.

For a little while it seems like you are going to get a real crack at happiness. That's another way to spell Topsies. It's the life of Riley rolled up in a pill. That's what you lost.

"We're one step from Paradise," Benny says once, and he chuckles, soft in his throat.

But Something don't want people happy. "Misery makes

the world go round," Benny says. "Contented people don't buy television sets."

That's Benny. Nobody ever understands him like me. He is always thinking about somebody else, how they can get something they ain't got. "Give the people what they want!" he says. And he makes a business out of it.

Don't get me wrong; Benny has no allergy to money, and it is a good business. When times are good, he makes a few million at it, I guess, even if the T-men can't never prove anything.

Benny's smart. Somebody wrote once Benny is a genius born to organize the U.S. into one big racket. It all come natural with Benny, as he leaves high school before the first year is over. But what Benny don't have, he knows where to get it.

People don't like him say Benny never had an idea of his own, he could only take somebody else's idea and shine it up like new. Maybe so. When Prohibition come in, Benny isn't the first to see that the market is built in, but he starts out with two coins in his pocket to jingle together and he ends up bigger than any of them.

That's when I start working for him.

People say Benny never thinks of nobody but hisself. This is a lie. I seen him pass out lettuce by the sackful—what's more, it is to cops and D.A.'s and Benny never has no use for either one.

And take me. Benny keeps me around for 25-30 years, and I am doing nothing but bringing him a drink or a smoke or persuading some guy that he should not stand in Benny's light.

That's another reason I got to set you right.

I hear it said that Topsies is the Professor's idea and Benny hijacked it like a truck of hot hooch. That's all wrong. The Professor don't hardly have anything to do with it. With him it's nothing. Benny takes it and sees

how he can use it in his business.

It starts real small.

We are just sitting around—the three of us—in Benny's Beverly Hills place, trying to keep cool with some bonded stuff, but this does not have the *zing* of the rum we used to run in from Cuba in the old days. Benny has been getting restless lately after ten years of practically legal retirement. Suddenly he looks up from his glass and says, "What's with these goof balls?"

The look in his eyes is far away, like I remember from the Thirties and earlier. The back of my head starts tingling, and I think there's something going to happen. This is maybe the only thing the same about Benny.

When he starts in the business he is just a young punk, no different looking from a thousand of them; what is different is inside. He is skinny then and short—no more than five-five even with the one-inch heels like he wears—but he has the darkest, hottest eyes I ever seen.

Since then he ain't growed any up, but he growed some out. He's got a belly on him, and his face is blurred when I see him sudden, not expecting it. Other times I see only the Benny I used to know, like I got X-ray eyes to see through the fat to the man underneath.

"Amphetamine," the Professor says, not looking up from his book.

Amphetamine. You're surprised I should know the word. You're not half as surprised as Benny when he sees me with the medical dictionary. But that comes later.

"Who?" says Benny.

"Goof balls," says the Professor. "Known as stimulants or antidepressants in the trade. Trade names: Benzedrine, Dexedrine. Until the manufacturers changed the formula, convicts used to chew up the wafers from inhalers. You aren't supposed to get 'em without a prescription. Too

dangerous. They're not strictly addicting, but users feel so lousy when the goof ball wears off, they reach for another."

"Bet I could get some," says Benny, thoughtful. "Bet I could go in any drug store in town, lay down a twenty and say, 'Here's my prescription.'"

"You'll always find corruption if you look for it."

Benny's eyes are bright. "People want 'em and can't get 'em?"

"People want lots of things they can't get—opium, heroin, cocaine, marijuana. . . ." the Professors says.

"You never did get it," Benny says, shaking his head sorrowful. "Who makes the laws? A lot of bluenoses. A bunch of killjoys. They don't want nobody to enjoy nothing they can't get a boot out of. And another thing. Dope is against the law. Goof balls is just kind of illegal, like hooch was in the good old days, and them things nobody gets hot about."

"Relax, Benny. Enjoy your ill-gotten gains." The Professor still has not looked up, which is a mistake as he does not see the look in Benny's eyes. I know, though, that the Professor has gone too far; sooner or later he will be sorry he said that. Benny has been respectable for ten years now, and he don't like nobody reminding him different.

"I like to have a person's attention," Benny says, real quiet.

Like he was begging to be stepped on, the Professor just keeps on reading and says, "If you got to get back in the game, there's something new I been working on which is the next great step in pharmaceutics: multi-purpose pills."

"Lay down the book, Professor," says Benny. This time the Professor gets the idea.

He puts it down careful with a bookmark for his place instead of open, because he thinks more of books than he does of people. This book, the Professor tells me later, is on the decline and fall of the rum empire; it is about Repeal, I guess. He also says it is wrote by a monkey, which I know is a joke because no monkey could have wrote such a thick book.

The Professor has a thin body and a thin face; there is even a thin, gray tuft of beard on the chin. He has deepset blue eyes which always look like they are laughing without no joke. He is no professor, though; he ain't never taught in college. That is just what we call anybody who knows more about books that the rest of us.

Once the Professor is a doctor, medical type. Benny bought him a long time ago, and he has his license lifted shortly afterward for dispensing narcotics and being careless about the records.

He tells us about the pills. They are made in layers like a onion wth a coat of shellac between. On the outside, say, they got a sedative, inside, a stimulant. This does away with all the sleep problems that people are having these days.

Instead of not getting waked up in the morning until the afternoon, they take the pill at night. The barbituate on the outside sings them a lullaby; before the guy has time to worry about his bank balance, he is pounding his ear. In eight hours the shellac melts, the amphetamime goes "Zowie!" and he's out of bed, cheerful, rested, and ready for bear.

It seems like nine-tenths of a guy's troubles are worrying about not getting enough sleep; this keeps him awake so that next day he is too sleepy to work. The Professor calls it a vicious circle.

Benny sits in his wrought-iron and canvas chair, not moving, looking through the glass wall distant over the

hills toward the Pacific. Finally he says, "Man cannot live on sleep alone."

So you see it was Benny's idea after all.

For a while it is like Saturday night in the red-light district until I begin to wish for some of them pills the Professor tells about, being just as big but not as young as I used to be. Benny and the Professor sit up until the night turns gray, just talking, using the big words and the funny names. That's when I sneak out and buy the dictionary; I write down the words and look them up later.

Benny writes a check for the Professor. When I see the amount, even I am startled. Benny laughs and says you could have knocked my eyes off with a stick.

With the money the Professor leases a plant that has gone broke making laxatives (the owners are too old-fashioned to fake it up like candy or chewing gum). It has a laboratory and a production line, and he buries himself there with his assistants.

One of these is Dan Cooper. Dan is a young pill roller with ideals and not much money (it is funny how these things seem to go together). He is handsome, tall, and brown, and he has a fine future. He also has a sister named Alison who is no bigger than a bug and just as cute.

I know a lot about Dan Cooper. Benny has his eye on him from the start. Benny likes smart young guys; he tells me to find out everything I can—the good and the bad. And I do.

Then, just as we are ready to swing into production, the Professor collapses. It don't surprise me none, as he has been working twenty-eight hours a day for a month. I do not see this myself (being on the Dan Cooper job). In fact only Benny is there.

He calls Dan in to hear the news, how he and the Professor are in the Beverly Hills place and suddenly the

Professor breaks down. Benny brings him a drink, but he is past that. What he needs is a long rest. This is what he is going to have, Benny tells Dan, real sorrowful, no matter how bad he is needed at the plant.

Dan get a funny look on his face like maybe he is remembering something or waiting for something. It could be what Benny tells him then: he is putting Dan in charge of the plant, and production should start immediately.

Dan sits back, his tan fading. He is surprised and maybe pleased, too. This he should be, as he is only out of pharmacy school a few years, and he has answered our ad from his low-paying job as a chain store pill roller.

"From now on," Benny says, real cheerful, "you are our Pill Roller in Chief."

Dan gets back his color. I think he don't like the name, but he says only, "How much?"

This is sensible, and Benny says, "Ten thousand flat or five thousand and five percent of the net. Think it over. One thing we got to have fast—a name."

"Nostrum?" says Dan.

"The public don't go for these fancy Greek names," says Benny. "We need something they'll remember."

"Panacea?"

"Elixir?"

"Tonic?"

"Pill-O?" I toss in, caught in the game.

Benny gives me a nasty look, but Dan says it is not so bad for the sedative-stimulant pill. Benny shrugs and points out that we need a name for the whole line.

"Taps?" suggests Dan.

Benny makes a face and says that's what the bugles blow over the graves of dead soldiers.

Dan thinks for a little and says, hesitant, "Remedy?" Benny considers it but shakes his head.

"I got one more," Dan says, sighing. "Topsies."

Benny get this distant look in his eyes again. When he comes back he says, thoughtful, "Topsies?"

"I 'spect I growed, said Topsy," Dan says in a falsetto. "Don't think nobody never made me."

"Yeah," says Benny, soft and easy. "Yeah. They just growed. Danny boy, you just earned yourself a thousand buck bonus."

Dan sits back again, not realizing yet how Benny does things—big. People say a lot of things about Benny, but nobody ever says he is small.

There is just one thing, says Dan. What about distribution?

Benny says Dan should not worry about this. Dan's business is research and production, and Benny will take care of everything else.

This is a nice way of telling Dan to mind his own business, but that is Benny—always thinking of the other guy.

Dan needs money—he has some old debts, and he is putting Alison through college—but he frowns and says, "A lot of drugs we're using—Federal law prohibits dispensing without a prescription. I want to make it clear that I want no part of any conspiracy to break the law."

Benny looks thoughtful and then laughs. "Of course you don't. We're clean. I've already bought myself a fistful of medics. We're all set. Nobody can touch us. Why, we don't even need protection."

Dan studies the Persian rug on the floor like there is writing on it to tell him what to do. "I'll take the ten thousand," he says, and his voice is kind of hoarse.

"Okay, Pill Roller," Benny says, sort of sneering. I don't see what he got to sneer about. Dan has just saved Benny at least a hundred Gs.

A week later the ads start. Like I say, when Benny hasn't got it, he knows where to go for it. He hires him the highest-priced publicity man in L.A.—where publicity men

grow big and come high—but Benny says you get what you pay for, and in this case he is right.

For just a few days, this question runs on almost every page in every paper in Southern California: "TOPSIES! WHAT ARE THEY?" This is followed by: "LITTLE ANNIE ROONEY CAN DO IT—WHY NOT YOU? TOPSIES—THE NEW WAY TO FEEL GOOD ALL OVER." And: "IS YOUR DAY TOO MUCH FOR YOU? —ADJUST WITH TOPSIES!"

Finally comes the quarter-page ads, dignified, with a lot of white space like in the wedding announcement when Louie the Enforcer married the daughter of One-Shot McGee. I got it in front of me now:

FEELING LOW?
Topsies!
Revolutionary Discovery
Topsies!
We can cure what ails you
ONE PILL
And You're a New Man
Tailored
For You—And You Alone
Topsies!
(Under Medical Supervision)

After this come the billboards and the commercials. For a while Benny is using a theme song called "You're the Tops," but a man named Porter complains and Benny has a new one written special in a jiggling rhythm he calls calypso.

Well, the line forms on the right, and it is quite a line. Before the cut-rate drugs can figure out what hit them, we got all the business, and they got bottles on their shelves and counters which collect nothing but dust.

Because Topsies has got it. I know. When Dan says he needs someone to test new Topsies on, Benny looks around and his eye lights on me. "What," says Dan, "your Boswell?" Since Benny only smiles, I do not resent it. It is not in my medical dictionary, but Benny tells me it is about my writing down words.

From then on I have no trouble sleeping. Life, like the radio says, can be beautiful. At bedtime I am taking Pill-Os. When the deluxe model comes out, I take that, too. I never do figure out how they do it. A couple minutes after it goes down, I hear far-off chimes playing "Rockabye Baby." Ten hours later (I need a lot of shut-eye), I get kicked out of bed with a jolt of amphetamine and a bugle playing "Reveille."

As I was in the Army, I am not fond of this last, and I get them to change it to "Red Red Robin."

That was only the beginning.

Before it is over it gets so walking down the street is like taking a stroll through a record store; you are haunted by muffled tunes.

The way Benny explains it, the idea is so simple that you wonder why nobody thinks of it before. Benny says that is the way with all great ideas.

A man isn't a machine to oil and gas up and send on its way. A man needs a lot of different things at a lot of different times. Maybe he needs a kick in the pants to get him started in the morning. Maybe at night he needs a pat on the back to unstring him, a shove through the fun-house door, and a rocking chair to send him to dreamland when the fun is over.

Life, says Benny, is a lot like a roller coaster. It's not the ups and downs get you; it's not being ready for them. What a man needs is something to help him enjoy the ups and make the most of them, to smooth out the downs and start him back up again.

It seems like the good things in life happen when a man can't enjoy them, like girls when you're too young to know and too poor to do anything about it. And when you're old enough and rich enough, the importance is gone. Topsies can't do much about the first thing.

Topsies growed all right.

From two layers, they go to four, then six, eight, and finally—Dan's masterpiece—a 16-layer pill that lasts all week end. I am the guinea pig for all of them.

They're simple, too. All the medics need is a schedule, and they prescribe enough pills to last a week, a month, a year. They ain't too expensive, neither—not for what you get, which is a personality tailored to your day. Not many of us can tailor our days to ourselves.

Take the standard eight-layer Topsy. Wake up with a cheerful Benzedrine glow. A hour later pepsin and bismuth help you digest your breakfast. Shortly afterward you get your daily dose of vitamins, which you will otherwise forget. Layer four is caffein and dextrose for quick energy to combat the midmorning slump; this also saves time, as it replaces the coffee break.

After the eat-and-run businessman's special, there's more pepsin and bismuth. Layer six is cascara; nature may forget, but Topsies never do. The next layer is optional, depending on your plans for the evening. If you're going on the town, it's more amphetamine to make sure you enjoy it; if you're staying home, it's an aphrodisiac for the same purpose.

And finally, of course, Nembutal for a well-deserved rest.

This is living. There is no pain, no strain, no worry about will you be ready for what happens. If you've planned right, you'll be ready. You got to be ready.

There's problems. There always is, in anything. Bugs, like they say in the airplane racket. People got to learn

to make schedules and stick to them. Otherwise they find themselves digesting their own stomachs or all heated up and no place to go.

These things iron themselves out.

We have a lawsuit or two. The troubleshooting department takes these in stride. There's the traveling salesman who got unexpected orders to stay on the road. A word to the judge, a few bucks to the chambermaid, and a call from the salesman's district manager (a faithful customer), and there's no difficulty.

In spite of the medics on the payroll and the hand-tailoring of every pill, the price is right. Assembly line methods make them practically cheap. At the peak, Benny is selling nearly a million a day, and that is just on the West Coast.

You'd think the pills would be too big to swallow. Funny enough, nobody ever has any trouble. Maybe it is the slick coating Dan puts on them. Benny, though, he says what with politics and commercials, people have got so they'll swallow anything.

Some of them pills is planned so careful that when it's time to head home from the nightclub a layer of vitamin B-6 hits the driver to sober him up. And next morning there is a layer of vitamin B-1 and some concentrated sauerkraut juice for the hangover.

Benny and Dan have pills for everybody. There is no more need to worry about baby's schedule; he's awake only to eat and say "Gah!" when Daddy comes home. In the evening the kids are out of the way on time; when it is time for them to get sleepy, they're sleepy. There are even Topsies for housewives to match their favorite soap operas. And there is one well-known actress who is playing a tough role on Broadway that she could never have touched without Benny.

Special jobs like this, of course, cost extra.

It seems like there is no limit to what Topsies can do.

Once in a while we are annoyed by Food & Drug snoopers, but they can't touch us. Everything we dispense is prescribed. The local medical society gets blood in its eye. They suggest that the medics we have bought for the business are not what they should be; they can't treat that many people a day. This is mere jealousy; the business of the local medics has been cut in half.

We're all pretty much the same.

Benny quietly points out to each and every one of them that they are all wide open to malpractice suits. The subject is dropped.

And then there is the Revenue agents. The poor and the T-men, Benny says, we always have with us. Benny has filed only one quarterly estimate, and they are suspicious already. Benny shows them the books, how he is scarcely making a dime, what with rent, expenses, and salaries. Each of the docs, for instance, is getting a hundred grand each.

It is practically philanthropy on Benny's part.

The T-men suspect, of course, that Benny is getting a kickback from the medics and maybe a few others, but if so it is done so clever they can't prove nothing.

That is Benny; he is always legal.

I am in the middle of a 16-layer-special when I discover what is in the basement. And boy, do I feel sick.

Dexedrine has lifted me out of bed, humming, a shot of B-complex vitamins has cured my hangover and give me a appetite, and I am going down to pick me out a steak for breakfast.

When the doorbell bongs I am glad to come up. Extremely glad!

It is Dan Cooper. He looks at me like he thinks I am a ghost, and he only gets a little off the track. He is

excited himself, as he is supposed to meet Benny here and where is he?

Benny comes down the stairs in his silk robe, so quiet you are surprised, and he says what's the matter, Danny boy?

Dan jumps and then blurts out that he's been taking inventory for the Feds and there is chlorpromazine missing from the laboratory. Also some Phenergan and Dolosal.

There is nothing to get upset about, Benny says, but Dan insists that the stuff is dangerous. Somebody could fool around with it and get hurt, as it is not fully tested.

Well, what does it do, asks Benny, but he is not much interested.

The chlorpromazine makes drugs work better, says Dan, like anesthetics, sedatives, and narcotics. Alone, it makes like winter on bears, a sort of three-months sedative. With Phenergan and Dolosal, it makes a cocktail that nobody would ask for refills, as it blocks the automatic nervous system.

All of this I do not understand, even later when I look up the words, but somehow I breathe easier about what I seen in the basement.

Besides, Dan winds up, he is responsible for the stuff and suppose the Food & Drug boys drop around?

This is nothing, says Benny. In the first place the drugs are probably gone from when the Professor was in charge. Professor was always a little careless with records.

Benny looks at me and chuckles.

So the Professor is holding the sack. In the second place, says Benny, he is getting in his own bookkeeper to take care of petty details like inventory so that Dan will not be bothered.

There is only one thing for Dan to do, and he does it. He shrugs. By the way, he says, like he just thought of it, where *is* the Professor?

"Who wants to know?" Benny asks sharp.

"Something might come up we need him," Dan points out. "He kept a lot of details in his head."

Benny laughs, easy. "Don't worry. You want him, we got him on ice."

I jump then. Dan looks at me funny. "Sure, sure," I say, and Benny looks at me funny.

Some days you can't win.

"One more thing," says Dan, "I want you should take away the men who been watching my sister."

Benny looks sad and shakes his head. "You don't understand, Danny boy. Those men are only for your sister's protection. After twenty-thirty years, there's men who still got it in for me. They're scared to come at me direct, so they take it out on the people who work for me."

He waggles his head sorrowful. "There's crazy people walking the streets. You should never see what they did to the wife of a runner of mine. Acid. . . ." Even Benny looks a little sick. "We wouldn't want anything like that to happen to your sister."

See what I mean about Benny? A real, sweet guy.

Dan don't get it. He sits there, white as heroin, not saying a word.

What's more, Benny goes on, there is that time Dan rolled the wrong pills at the chain-store pharmacy. Well, we all know it is a accident, what with working double shifts to pay expenses; even the police are convinced. But Alison might not understand. Dan wouldn't want some louse to spill that story, would he?

Still Dan don't understand. "You got to see what you are doing to the kid!" he blurts out. "Why should she be tortured because of me?"

Benny puts his arm around Dan's shoulder and hugs him like when he is special fond of a person. "Look, Danny boy," he says real gentle, "all you got to do is take care

of your end of the business, and you got nothing to worry about. You roll the pills; I'll take care of everything else. Okay?"

Dan takes a deep breath and shakes his shoulders like he don't want Benny's arm on him but can't get rid of it. Finally he realizes that Benny is only worried about him for his own good. "Okay," he says. His shoulders droop.

As he goes out he looks back at me like he thinks I know something and can maybe help him.

He is half right. When he is gone, I turn to Benny and say, "The boy is scared. You shouldn't oughta scare him, Benny."

Benny is looking off toward the Pacific. "A man got to be a little scared," he says soft. "It keeps him honest. One thing wrong with the Professor—he wasn't scared any more."

"The Professor—" I begin.

He puts his eyes on me like he used to. "The Professor is all right, understand. He's taking a rest. He don't need no help from you, what he's doing."

"Sure, but—"

"Jim," he says, sadlike, "don't you turn on me, too."

"Who turned on—" I stop; his eyes are hot. "Sure—I mean—of course. You know me, Benny."

For a while after that everything is rosy. The narcotics charge is just a bag of wind; there is nothing in it, and I want everyone should know Benny don't have nothing to do with snow or horse or anything like that. He is too smart to lay himself open for a Federal rap when he can make his legal.

Sure, maybe he does a favor for a friend and has a Topsy made up for a special occasion, harmless like hashish, yohimbine, Seconal, Dexedrine. . . . But nobody will scare into spilling anything for the Feds to work on,

and the charge gets dropped fast.

It ain't all just sit back and count the moola, either. A man with a good thing gets competition. Benny, though, he knows how to handle competition. He knows from away back. The boys who try to use their muscle for an in get muscled right out on their fannies; they should know better. The legitimate boys are helpless for another reason: they can't figure out how we do it.

Think it over. A 16-layer pill to last for two days, three days, all week? Swell. Anybody can do it, and nobody can get a patent on it. We ain't got no protection. But we got what Dan calls a trade secret which keeps us from losing our monopoly: we know how to keep the Topsy in the stomach all week!

Some people say "Cork!" but that's silly. If we have a ball of cork in the middle to make the Topsy float, as soon as we sell the first one, it's no secret. Somebody else says they are hollow and what makes them float is the air pocket. They're all wet, too.

The idea I like the best is that the core of each Topsy is iron and with each pill we furnish a little magnet that fits in the navel. Anybody what ever took a Topsy knows how funny this is.

And then there's people—doctors, some of them—say Topsies ain't nothing but sugar. Placebos, they call them. Psychological. They should know better. Any lab could tell them different.

What is it? I ain't telling. The Professor worked it out, and it's worth money in large, unmarked bills, which I am not giving away. I'll tell you this much. It ain't sugar. It ain't cork, it ain't iron, and it ain't air. And I'll whisper something else: don't give up hope—maybe Topsies ain't dead.

But, as I say, everything goes as smooth as two-hundred-buck call girl. L.A. is practically in our pocket. We got

the Hollywood trade, we got the tourist trade, and what's most important we got the retired-Iowa-dentist trade. We are just about to go national.

Benny is talking production with some big-time pill rollers (Squibb and Merck look down their noses at us, which I figure is their neck). He is talking distribution with the top men in the rackets who would otherwise take it personal should we move in without their okay and percentage. He is talking, more quietly, to some union leaders with the same purpose. And some men with bankrolls to choke a alligator are pleading with Benny to take it and make it grow—like Topsies.

Then it happens.

Benny is in Dan's office at the plant, talking about a new 32-layer special, when the telephone rings. Dan reaches for the receiver, but Benny, still quick, beats him to it. Even where I am sitting I can hear the voice squeaking over the wire. The words I can't make out, but I watch Benny's face. It gets pale, then red, then funny gray like stone. His eyes are hard and hot—a mixture that makes my legs weak.

"Somebody," he says softlike as he sets down the receiver, "has tipped off the cops." And he looks at me.

"My God, Benny!" I say, squeaking a little myself. "You don't think I did it?"

"I don't know, but I tell you this—if you did it I advise you to head west and keep going."

"But the ocean is out that way!"

"That's what I mean," says Benny.

I shudder. "What's going on?" I plead.

"The cops are on their way to the Beverly Hills place. They should be there by now. And you know what they're going to find."

"Yeah," I say, shaky, remembering what is in the basement.

"After that," says Benny, "they'll be coming after me."

"Maybe we both should start walking west," I say.

"Nuts!" Benny snarls. "They got nothing on me. They can't prove a thing. The only stuff can hurt me I got locked up in the one place they got no key to—my head."

"A lot of hard guys thought that," I say, sorrowful. "Only the cops got a rubber key that fits most of them."

Benny looks thoughtful like he is remembering. Then he shakes hisself, and he is the old Benny. "They used to pull me in two-three times a month back in the old days. They never beat nothing out of me."

"That is twenty-five years ago," I remind him. "You ain't as young nor as hard as you used to be."

"For once, Jim, you are right. I got no right to take chances," says Benny. "I got my responsibilities." He turns to Dan, who has been sitting in front of the desk not saying a word; he does not looks as worried as he might be. "Dan. You are going to make me up a Topsy, and it is going to be timed tighter than a bank job."

"Okay, Benny," says Dan. "I'm just the pill roller. You tell me what you want, and I will roll it."

"The first layer will be Benzedrine," Benny says, looking distant. "When the cops come, I want to be on top of them. It is five miles from here to the station downtown; the patrol car will make it in ten minutes. I will spend thirty minutes talking to the brass before they take me to the little room. They will then take twenty minutes to warm up before they get impatient. That is an hour. One hour of amphetamine and brainwork. Then I want a sedative to hit me."

"I got it," says Dan, looking interested.

Benny studies his watch. "It is now 8:23. The cops will be here by 9:00, even if they can't find anybody knows I am here. An hour later is 10:00. To be on the safe side, the sedative will last for twelve hours. By that time my

lawyer will be there with a writ. That's when the last layer will start to work. I want another jolt of amphetamine so I can laugh at the slobs in blue as I leave. Okay?"

"Right," says Dan, and he is smiling as he hurries past me into the lab.

He is back within half an hour, the Topsy lying in his hand like a golden marble. By then Benny has finished off the legal details with his lawyer, and there is nothing more he can do.

"The cops just passed me," says the squawk box on Dan's desk, in a nervous voice.

"Happy days," says Benny, and downs the Topsy without a chaser.

The cops find the Professor, as Benny knows they will. He is just as I seen him when I went to the freezer for a T-bone and lost my appetite—stretched out in the long box like it was a new kind of coffin.

The freezer is not as cold as you might think. Benny has bored holes through the sides and the lid, and the cold sort of leaks out. But it is cold enough, and the Professor is stiff and blue.

I seen corpses look healthier.

But the Professor is no corpse, even though he has frost in his whiskers. When the coroner starts probing him, he sits up and complains bitterly because they have interrupted his sleep. He swears—and the cops cannot break down the story—that he is experimenting with chlorpromazine, and he is using himself as a guinea pig.

Benny, he says, agrees to help, and the Professor asks him to put his body away to see how long he will hibernate. Maybe, he tells the cops, he has discovered something that will revolutionize the world—a new way to spend the winter. In hard times the unemployed can be put away until needed.

This does not make the boys at headquarters feel too happy, as they have pulled in Benny and treated him with little respect. This is a mistake when they have not caught him with the smoking gun in his hand.

It looks then like Benny has beat the rap. His lawyer brings the writ to the station like he is the jailor hisself and the writ is the key to Benny's cell.

He is in for a shock which ruins what little is left of his respect for human nature.

The cops have Benny four ways from Sunday. They have him wrapped up as tight as the lowest petty larcenist ever caught. The D.A. is rubbing his hands, thinking about how he is going to like living in the governor's mansion. And Benny has done it all hisself.

The Topsy is to blame for it all. If there is ever a Frankenstein's monster, that is it.

The first layer works like an Alabama convict. Then the second layer melts, and the cops sit there with their eyes bugging out and their ears flapping. Just in time they remember to bring in a recorder and a stenographer. Both.

Benny answers questions, and the cops don't even lay a pinky on him. He tells them things even I don't remember, about New York and the old days, details, names, addresses. Where he gets them I do not know, as his memory is never so good before. He sings like he is the biggest stoolie ever lived.

The cops get everything, from the waterfront rackets and numbers drops to the awful details about the Topsy business. They will be years picking up after the leads Benny gives them, even with the help of the F.B.I., the T-men, and police departments all over the country.

It is amazing how much a man can say in two hours before he falls asleep.

The sedative works fine. He does not feel a pain. There is only one small drawback. The sedative Dan uses is

scoplamine, which is what he calls a hypnotic.

Get the picture. Benny full of scopolamine, that bright light shining in his eyes, voices asking him questions out of the darkness. It is sickening.

Before Benny goes out, they get his signature on the statement. And he is never able to show a bruise.

The amphetamine hits Bennie at ten a.m. sharp. It goes "Zowie!" Benny sees the statement. He goes "Argh-gh!"

Topsies are finished.

The Feds step in. The licenses of the docs Benny has on the payroll are quietly lifted. The plant is closed down, and the stock of Topsies is tossed to the fishes. Who said "poor fishes?"

Dan, funny enough, has his pick of a dozen high-priced jobs. I guess a good pill roller is hard to find.

The ones what got taken, as always, is you—the people. For a little while you got a chance to live the life the gods would of lived if they had invented Topsies. Then it gets took away.

Seems like Something don't want people happy.

Look at Prohibition! Look at the Narcotics Act! Look at the anti-gambling laws! And now look at Topsies!

The reason I am telling you is I want you should know the truth about Benny. He ain't near as bad as they make out.

On a lot of the raps the statute of limitations has run out, but the cops got enough on Benny to hold him until he can use his beard for a mattress. This is all right with Benny. He don't want out. There are too many people waiting for him.

By the time you read this it will be too late to do anything. Because Benny is so cooperative, the cops refuse extradition and aren't near as hard as they might be.

He's doing life—without benefit of Topsies.

So are the rest of us.

OPEN ALL NIGHT

by Lawrence G. Blochman

A FEW hours before the murder, every stool was occupied in the Argonne Diner, Finicky Flynn's lunch wagon de-luxe, *open all night, ladies welcome.*

Flynn's tattooed arms, bare to the elbows, moved busily from counter to polished coffee machine to sizzling hot plate and back to counter—for at this time of night he was not only sole proprietor of the Argonne Diner, but chef, maitre d'hotel, and dish washer as well. He knew without asking what most of his customers wanted, for they were his regular midnight crowd, the majority of them. He deposited a Western sandwich in front of Clive, the sharp-nosed, sleepy-eyed

newspaper reporter, and remarked with obvious displeasure that Bojek, a hairy-eared, bullet-headed longshoreman had been sitting over one cup of coffee for twenty minutes of mumbled conversation with another dark husky with hair in his eyes.

"You birds want some sinkers with that coffee?" Flynn asked pointedly.

"No, tanks. Just coffee," said Bojek.

"Say, listen," said Flynn. "If you bozos want coffee, O.K., go ahead and drink it. But if you think you're doin' me a favor keepin' my stools warm, forget it. I can use them stools for payin' customers."

"Me and Mars was just talking," said Bojek. "We been waiting for somebody."

"Yeah, well, this ain't no waitin' room," said Flynn. "Drink your coffee and ease off them stools."

"Maybe you better give us some doughnuts, den," said Bojek. He tossed a two-dollar-bill across the counter.

Flynn served the doughnuts and made change for the bill. He filled a can with hot coffee for a telegraph messenger who had just come in. He watched the boy go out again into the night. It had started to rain—a cold rain, mixed with soft sleet that stuck to the windows. He couldn't see very well, because the windows were cloudy with condensed moisture from the warm interior, but he caught a glimpse of something that caused his eyes to narrow and his lips to harden a trifle. A second later two flashily dressed men came in. Flynn knew both of them—particularly the man with the yellow, square-toed shoes, the purple tie and the fawn-colored felt hat.

"Howdy, Cocky," Flynn addressed the purple tie, ignoring his companion."

"Howdy, Finicky."

The man in the purple tie was Jim DeWitt—called Cocky DeWitt when he had been regimental mess sergeant and Flynn the cook for E company. They were old soldiers, both Flynn and DeWitt, old soldiers with service at a score of posts, behind them when the regiment went to France. They were both cooks, but they had fought—fought between themselves—during four enlistments. They had started to fight when DeWitt was a company cook himself. They had continued on the slightest provocation—when Sergeant DeWitt had refused to increase the issue of garlic to Cook Flynn, claiming that garlic was not fit for white men's food; when Cook Flynn, in charge of a field kitchen in France, had sent Sergeant DeWitt's detail back three miles for onions. The onion incident was the culmination of a series of episodes which won for Richard Henry Flynn the name "Finicky."

Flynn's menu on that particular day had included beef stew. When there had been some question as to the wisdom of Flynn sending back the detail over ground open to occasional artillery fire, he explained: "Marshal Foch was in the sector that day. Now all Frenchmen have a natural-born knowledge of cookin' just like all Irishmen have a natural-born knowledge of fightin'! What kind of a cook would the Marshal think I was, makin' beef stew without onions? I just had to have them onions."

There had been other fights, too—over blondes, over brandy, over brunettes—but none as violent and deep-seated as the antagonism arising out of DeWitt's scorn for Flynn's insistence on culinary exactitude, and out of Flynn's scorn for DeWitt's skill as a cook. "If he'd been any good, he wouldn't have had to get himself a mess sergeant's chevrons to high-hat the rest of us," Flynn had once said.

Flynn had left the army first and had bought his lunch wagon almost immediately. DeWitt got out six months later. He had hunted Flynn up almost immediately; he probably had missed the pleasure of the old feud as much as Flynn had. He came around to the Argonne Diner about once a week—alone at first, and very mysterious about what he was doing, and the vague "big deals" he was going to put over. Lately he had been coming around with Max Shavers, the pasty-faced gentleman with the pointed shoes, gray spats and pearl gray shoes, who now accompanied him.

Flynn knew Max Shavers and his gold-toothed grin. He knew him slightly by his unsavory reputation even before Cocky DeWitt had brought him around personally, and he had no desire to know him better. The last time Cocky had brought him around, Shavers had been pretty much coked up, and wanted to fight everybody. Flynn had thrown him out of the lunch wagon bodily. The Argonne Diner was a place to eat, not to start brawls. The street was plenty big enough for that.

"Cocky," said Flynn, giving Shavers a fishy stare, "I thought I told you to leave your friend home next time you come around here."

"Can that stuff, Finicky," said DeWitt. "What do you think you're running here, a country club or something? Sling us a couple mugs of java and two hot beef sandwiches. Make Max's on rye, and don't put no gravy on mine. I like it that way."

"I ain't got a thing in the place that your friend could eat," said Flynn to DeWitt. "Not a thing. Maybe he better try some other place. There's the Greasy Spoon right up the block a ways—"

Max Shavers slid off his stool and leaned his elbows on the counter as he pushed his head forward to glare at Flynn.

"Are you talking to me?" he demanded.

"I wasn't," said Flynn. "I was tryin' to save myself the trouble. But I'm talkin' to you now. I'm tellin' you that I threw you outa here once, and I still don't want you to come back. This ain't no Ex-Burglars' Club!"

Flynn tried to be nonchalant in his tirade. He casually picked up a bullet-proof coffee cup and polished it as he spoke, but the muscles standing out in his brick-colored neck betrayed his emotion.

In the tense second of silence that followed the end of Flynn's speech, Bojek, the bullet-headed longshoreman who had been watching Max Shavers with sidelong glances ever since his entrance, pulled his companion by the sleeve. The two left their coffee and doughnuts untouched, and made a hurried exit. A chill blast of air blew in through the crack they left in sliding the door open.

Shavers didn't move for several seconds. Suddenly he thrust his hands into his coat pockets, slowly withdrew one of them. His fingers grasped a stick of chewing gum. Watching Flynn the while, he peeled off the tin foil, folded the stick of gum in half, popped it into his mouth. Chewing audibly for an instant, he finally spoke.

"Listen," he said, "if you want to get hard"

Flynn set his cup down on the counter with such force that the handle snapped off between his thumb and forefinger.

"Get outa here" he ordered.

DeWitt nervously pulled Shavers away from the counter. He flung his arms about him and pushed him toward the door.

"Come on, Max, you ain't got time to fight tonight," he said.

Shavers suddenly seemed to grow reasonable. Mak-

ing a contemptuous noise with his lips, he whirled and followed DeWitt into the night, leaving the door wide open.

Flynn started around the end of the counter to close the door when three new customers came in and saved him the trouble. One was a taxi-driver named Smith who came in nearly every night between twelve and one for a fried egg sandwich. The others were a man in dinner jacket and an ox-eyed blonde in evening clothes who had got out of a long low coupe at the curb.

Flynn didn't really cater to the Stiff Shirt trade, he reflected as he started Smith's egg sizzling, but he was resigned to getting a certain amount of it. Not that he was hypocritical about the gilt-lettered announcement on the door that ladies were welcome; they were. Flynn liked to gaze upon a nice-looking jane, even if she did exude expensive perfumes that hardly blended with the aroma of frying onions, and her silken gown looked out of place among the corduroy and denims and leather jackets of the regular customers of the Argonne Diner. Flynn didn't even mind the twitterings and the self-conscious feeling of devilishness that always marked the advent of a woman in evening dress into an eating place of the lower strata. He did resent the inevitable condescension of their escorts, however.

Contemplation of the problem of the Stiff Shirts temporarily banished unpleasant thoughts of DeWitt and Max Shavers from Flynn's mind.

"What'll it be, folks?" he demanded, running his dish towel over the counter.

"I want a hamburger," piped the ox-eyed blonde, "without onions.".

"There ain't no such thing," replied Flynn, looking at the wedding ring on the girl's finger.

"Why not?" protested the Stiff Shirt, pointing at the

men chalked on the blackboard above Flynn. "It says hamburger there."

"That's with onions," said Flynn, not turning around.

"Can't you leave the onions out?" piped the blonde.

"Sure he can," said her escort. He had a voice that somehow did not go with his evening clothes.

"Can't give you hamburger without onions," insisted Flynn. "Ground steak without onions is Salisbury. Either you want hamburger or you want Salisbury."

"I want Salisbury," said the girl.

"Make it two—and coffee," said her escort.

While the meat cakes were frying on the hot grid, Flynn watched the newcomers curiously. The man's mind was obviously elsewhere. He was using his eyes and ears alertly, seemingly expecting someone, or something . . . He swallowed half his coffee but did not touch his sandwich.

"Give us the check," said the Stiff Shirt at last.

"That'll be a dollar," said Flynn, leaning forward to display his arms on the counter so that the perfumed lady could admire the nude beauty with her red hair coiled about her blue nakedness tattooed on his left forearm. "Thirty for the sandwiches, ten for the java"

"And thirty each cover charge," broke in the man in evening clothes. "I know the spiel! We came down here to gawk and there's no reason why we should get a floor show free—particularly as the cover goes to the unemployed. Here . . ." He tossed forty cents in change to the counter and ostentatiously pushed a five-dollar-bill through the slot in Finicky Flynn's Unemployed Fund box at the end of the counter.

"Thanks," said Flynn, "and excuse me for not recognizin' an old customer. It was your dame that threw me off. Last time you come down here it was with a dark lookin' gal."

The Stiff Shirt was about to say something in reply when a series of six sharp explosions sounded somewhere outside. His entire facial expression changed for the brief fraction of a second as he jerked his head around.

"Don't be alarmed," sain Flynn. "That's just some truck backfirin'."

But the Stiff Shirt, his face again expressionless, was making a hurried exit, pushing the ox-eyed blonde before him. A few seconds later his car was roaring away from the curb.

"I should of remembered that bird," said Flynn to Smith, the chauffeur with a crooked nose who was reaching in his pocket for change. "He came around last week in that same car—it's some Eyetalian car—what do they call 'em—Rizotto Maraschino?"

But Chauffeur Smith was no longer listening. With his sleeve he had wiped away some of the steam from the window pane and was peering into the night. The series of sharp sounds like trucks backfiring had resumed with greater frequency and staccato.

"That ain't no truck!" exclaimed Smith. "That's a gunfight!"

He tossed some money to the counter and rushed out. His curiosity spread to Flynn's other customers, and in less than a minute the diner was empty. Flynn himself would have loved to follow the excitement but he could not leave his lunch wagon. For a moment he watched through the space in the window that Smith had cleared. He saw people running in the dark street, heard police whistles. Two motorcycles flashed by, sirens screaming. Then he decided to brave pneumonia, flung the door open, and went out into the cold rain in his shirt sleeves in order to see better.

There was a crowd gathering some two hundred yards

down the street, in front of one of the peaked pier entrances that loomed in line in the darkness like the teeth of a giant saw. He craned his neck and shaded his eyes for several minutes, but could make nothing of the confusion. Then he saw a man running toward him out of the night—running, but with a decided limp. When the man saw Flynn, he dropped suddenly into a walk, hesitated, stopped, and was about to move on again when Flynn accosted him.

"What's all the shootin' about?" asked Flynn.

"I don't know," said the man.

"What'd you stop for just now?" Flynn demanded gruffly.

"Nothing," said the man.

"Nothing my eye," said Flynn. "You was just gettin' ready to touch me for a handout."

He quickly sized up the man who stood shivering in the rain. He could not be more than twenty. His pale face was pinched and thin. He had large intelligent eyes and bright red hair that showed beneath a gray cap. He wore no overcoat. He was shivering violently.

"As a matter of fact," said the youth, "I was thinking of coming in to ask you if you wouldn't let me wash dishes or something in return for a bite to eat."

"I suppose you been out of a job for six months and ain't had anything to eat for three days," Flynn suggested.

"No," said the youth, "I lost my job just ten weeks ago, and I had a little something to eat this morning."

"Where'd you work?"

"I used to wrestle crates at Washington Market."

"Let's see your hands."

The youth withdrew his hands from his pockets and turned his palms up. His hands were blue with cold but there were signs of callouses on them. A man doesn't

get callouses hanging around pool halls, Flynn reflected.

"I'll give you some chow," said Flynn, "but you got to work for it. I don't put much stock in the yarn you birds hand out."

He led the red-headed youth into the little room shut off at one end of the car, which was the potato-peeling and dish-washing department of the Argonne Diner.

"My name's Johnson," said the youth, "and I'm—"

" I don't care what your name is," interrupted Flynn. "All I want is for you to manicure them spuds there. I'll pass you some chow in here. You ain't very ornamental to have sittin' out front."

For the moment Flynn forgot the commotion at the pier. The redhead's forlorn appearance had touched him. The kid might be a professional pan-handler and all that, but he sure was cold and he looked thin enough to bear out any story of starvation. He was sitting on a box, his eyes closed, both arms hugging his left knee when Flynn brought in a heaping plate of steaming corned beef and cabbage.

"Eat this," he ordered, "and then get to work on them spuds."

Flynn returned to the counter. The diner was still empty, so he cut a thick roast beef sandwich, and put it into a bag. He struck the No Sale key of his register, reached for a dollar bill, changed his mind and instead fished out the two-dollar-bill Bojek had given him. A two-dollar-bill was bad luck anyhow, Flynn explained to himself in justification for his generosity; he'd probably be giving it out in change as a one. He put the money in the sack with the sandwich and went into the pantry.

"Hey, you" he said, throwing the paper bag to the redhead. "Stick this in your pocket. Not that you're earnin' it. But it's just in case you don't find any suck-

ers around breakfast time tomorrow."

He slammed the door closed before the redhead could thank him, in case the kid had any gratitude in his make-up. Customers had started to come in and as he prepared their orders, Flynn got from them confused and conflicting stories of the shooting. It was not long, however, before he got the official version from Officer Hall—the pink-faced, stub-nosed cop on the beat.

Hall was a pretty good cop, in Flynn's eyes, because he always insisted on paying for what he ate. Flynn didn't always take his money—a restaurateur had to be polite to the cop on his beat—but the gesture of not expecting to eat free endeared him to Flynn.

"A lot of ammunition wasted," was Hall's explanation. "We had the tip, and still they got away—clean, it looks like."

"Who got away?" Flynn wanted to know.

"The yeggs that've been pulling these dock robberies for the last three months," said Hall. "They been cracking open shipments from abroad before they got to the appraisers' stores. Only taking half of 'em, so the job wouldn't be noticed right off. Furs, mostly. Chinchillas from South America, and the like. We had a tip they were going to work on Pier G tonight. But it turned out to be Pier H, so our boys muffed it. They got a truck with a fake customs house license or something.

"Tough luck," said Flynn. "What'll you eat tonight, Officer? I got some damned fine corned beef I corned myself—"

"I won't have time," said Officer Hall. "I just come in to ask if you seen that man DeWitt that's in here sometimes."

"He was in about an hour or so ago," said Flynn.

"Alone?"

"No, he was with a guy."

"Who? That hophead Shavers?"

"I think that's his name. Why?"

"DeWitt lives around here, don't he?"

"Not that I know of. He used to live in Brooklyn. What happened to Cocky DeWitt?"

"Nothing," said Officer Hall, nodding to himself. "Only these detectives think they're the only policemen that ever wore a shield. I got a theory that the brains of the force wears uniforms, and I'm going to prove it tonight. So long, Flynn."

Within half an hour the lunch wagon was empty again. Flynn looked at the clock above the regimented rows of breakfast food in one-portion packages. It was twenty of three. Edwards, the night man, would be along pretty soon. Edwards handled the diner from three to ten in the morning, while Flynn slept. Flynn didn't think much of Edwards' ability, but he was good enough to fry bacon and eggs and cook oatmeal. Flynn himself always got up and came down to see that the lunch was cooked in a manner befitting the reputation of an old E Company cook and the Argonne Diner.

Edwards came in just as Flynn had finished drafting his menu for the day. He was a pock-marked, taciturn fellow whose mouth bore the constant expression of a man who had just eaten something bitter. Flynn made a note of the cash, put on his overcoat, turned up the collar, then suddenly remembered about the red-headed Johnson he had left peeling potatoes in the pantry.

"Good God," he said to himself, "I hope he ain't been peelin' spuds all this time."

He threw open the door. The pantry was empty. Only two or three potatoes had been peeled. The red-headed youth was gone. He must have left by the back way. On the floor, by the box he had been sitting on, was a large pool of blood, just beginning to coagulate.

"I might of known it," said Flynn, cursing himself for being too gullible. Still, that pool of blood bothered him. He told Edwards to wipe it up, offered no explanation, and went out. He hurried through the cold rain to his furnished room a few blocks around the corner, two stories above the roar of the Ninth Avenue L.

He had been in bed and asleep scarcely an hour when he was awakened by an authoritative pounding.

"Open that door!" demanded a bass voice.

"Open it yourself," he replied sleepily. "I never lock it. There ain't nothin' to steal—"

Flynn blinked into the glare of two flashlights. He reached out of bed and switched on the electricity. He saw two burly men bending over him. One had a square-cut gray mustache. The other had a bulldog jaw.

"You've got a friend named James DeWitt?" barked the bulldog.

"I wouldn't call Cocky DeWitt a friend, exactly—"

"You know him, don't you?"

"Hell, yes. Too damned well, in fact."

"Where is he?" growled the man with the mustache.

"Listen, gents, don't wake up a guy in the middle of the night to ask him silly riddles—"

"Can the patter!" snapped the man with the mustache. "I'm Gloster of the detective bureau. Your friend DeWitt is wanted for murder."

"Murder?"

"That's it. Policeman Hall was shot dead in DeWitt's room fifteen minutes ago."

The word murder was sufficient to awaken Flynn fully. He swung his feet out of bed and stood up.

"You say Hall was killed in Cocky DeWitt's room?" he repeated incredulously.

"That's it," said Gloster, while his companion was roving about Flynn's room, opening closet doors and looking behind chairs. "In DeWitt's place around the corner on Jay Street."

"But DeWitt don't live on Jay Street," said Flynn.

"Oh, he don't? Where does he live then?" demanded Gloster.

Flynn hesitated. So far as he knew DeWitt lived in Brooklyn, but there was no use in divulging this information gratuitously to these dicks. Not that he had any intention of shielding DeWitt if he plugged Hall, because DeWitt was a louse and Hall was a good cop. Still—

"I don't know where he lives," said Flynn, "but I didn't think he lived anywhere near here."

"Well, he does," said Gloster. "He's had this place in Jay Street in his own name for the past six weeks, according to the landlady. And the plainclothesman who went there with Hall was waiting down at the street door when Hall went up. He says that DeWitt came along and went upstairs a little after Hall did, and that a minute later there were three shots. He rushed upstairs and found Hall dead, and the room empty. DeWitt hadn't come down. They're searching the house and the houses next door right now."

Flynn started to pull on a pair of trousers.

"Take me over to this place," he said, "and I'll probably be able to help you."

It was not yet daylight. The rain had subsided to a penetrating drizzle when Flynn and the two detectives walked out into Greenwich Street. On the way over to the Jay Street address, Flynn learned that Gloster had immediately come to see him because Hall, shortly before he had been killed, had phoned in to Headquarters to say that DeWitt and Max Shavers had been seen in

the Argonne Diner, and he intended calling on them at home.

"Did all this have anything to do with the dock robberies?" asked Flynn.

Gloster looked at him sharply as they passed a street lamp.

"What do you know about the dock robberies?" he demanded.

Flynn spat confidently six feet ahead of him.

"I know that the detective bureau's been workin' on the job for three months, durin' which time there's been God knows how many dollars worth of furs swiped, and that tonight, when they had the tip on a new job at Pier G, they muffed it because it happened to be Pier H—"

Gloster halted, pinioned Flynn's arms, and nodded to his companion, who immediately flashed a pair of handcuffs.

"Wait a minute," protested Flynn. "I'm just repeatin' what Officer Hall told me himself when he came into my joint askin' for DeWitt and Shavers."

Gloster fingered the handcuffs a moment, glared at Flynn, then passed the bracelets back to his companion. He started walking again.

A moment later they came to a dingy rooming house. A crowd of night hawks and early birds had gathered on the sidewalk, craning their necks and trying to push past the police lines that had been formed. An ambulance stood at the curb. Neighbors in various stages of undress leaned out of windows in the hope of seeing at least the corpse. Flynn and the two detectives pushed through the crowd and climbed three flights of musty-smelling stairs.

They entered the room which Gloster said was DeWitt's. It seemed crowded with policemen and report-

ers. Two ambulance surgeons were just lifting the body of Police Officer Pat Hall from a cot to a stretcher. He had been shot once in the back, they said, and once through the temple. A mirror had been broken by a shot from Hall's own gun, discharged instinctively as he fell. Besides the blood-soaked cot, there was little furniture in the room—two rickety chairs, a table on which stood a pack of greasy cards, a half-empty gin bottle and two glasses, a towel rack by a washstand, a gas plate in a corner, and a small cupboard. There were no clothes in the closet to indicate that the room had been anyone's permanent residence.

Finicky Flynn was looking into the closet when he suddenly began to sniff. "Something's burning," he said.

"Turn off that damned stove," Gloster ordered a uniformed officer. "There was something cooking on that gas plate when we first busted in," he explained to Flynn, "and in the excitement nobody thought of turning it off."

"Let's see it," said Flynn, walking over to the shelf that served as kitchen and justified the sign over the door of the house—"Housekeeping Rooms." He lifted the lid of a ten-cent-store saucepan and sniffed at the contents, which had merely begun to scorch on the bottom. He put back the lid and looked into the cupboard. Besides a meagre assortment of cheap crockery and cutlery, there was a loaf of French bread and a half-moon of odorous cheese.

"If I was you," said Flynn to Gloster, "I'd take this pot down to the station house and stick it in the ice chest. It'll come in handy when you start buildin' up evidence against the guy that plugged poor old Hall."

"We got all the evidence we need against DeWitt," growled Gloster. "And anyhow, Police Headquarters

ain't no cold storage plant. What's the idea, anyhow?"

"It might not be nothing at all," said Flynn. "I'll let you know later in the day. But in the meantime, if you can put some seals or somethin' on this pot so as to make the contents legal evidence, I'd be glad to keep it in my own ice box down to the Argonne Diner."

"No, you don't" said Gloster, suddenly suspicious that the evil-looking mess in the bottom of the pot might actually contain some miraculous clue that he did not care to admit was invisible to his own eyes. "I'll take it myself."

"That's O.K. with me," said Flynn. "And if I was you, I'd take that bread and cheese too."

"Is that all you got to tell us?" snorted Gloster. "I thought you were going to spill us some lowdown on this killing, and all you do is load us up with groceries."

"Suit yourself," said Flynn. "But I got to be going. I got work to do."

"Hold on," said the detective with the bulldog jaw. "You letting him go, Gloster?"

"He don't seem to be much help," said Gloster. "We'll talk to him again later. Beat it, chef, but don't try to give us the run-around."

"No chance," said Flynn. He knew, as he left, that he would be shadowed until Cocky DeWitt had been arrested. He walked home, pondering the events of the past half hour, thinking of DeWitt and Shavers, catching himself on the point of getting sentimental over the dead Hall. There are no tears to be shed over a cop getting killed. A cop is like a soldier. It's part of their business . . . He quickened his step. The streets were gray with the shadowless half-light that preceded dawn. The city was awakening. Trucks rumbled down West Street. Tug boats were hooting at each other in North River. He turned and climbed to his room.

A strange impression came over him as he opened the door. The room was dark, although he could distinguish objects by the gray half-light from the single window. He had an instinctive feeling that someone was in his room, that he had heard movement there before opening the door. He paused, with one foot still on the threshold, looking about. There was no one in sight, of course. Then his eyes fell on the door to the closet. He remembered that one of the detectives had left the closet open. It was closed now.

With three swift strides Flynn was beside his bed. He plunged his hand under his pillow for the Army .45 he always kept there, more by force of habit than because he feared aggression. The .45 was gone. He picked up the pillow, turned up the mattress. There was no doubt about it. There was no gun.

He took a step toward the closet, paused. Whoever was in the closet probably had his gun. He would have to bluff—if there was anyone in there. "Come outa there," he ordered, "before I blow you out."

There was a moment of silence. Flynn took another step toward the closet. Then a small, muffled voice, almost a whisper, said:

"Don't shoot, Finicky. It's me."

Flynn walked quickly to the closet, pulled the door open. Cocky DeWitt emerged, Flynn's .45 grasped in his trembling hand. There was nothing cocky about him now. His flashy clothes were bedraggled by rain and mud. His face was smeared with dirt. He was obviously badly frightened.

"What the hell are you doin' here?" demanded Flynn.

DeWitt made a frantic gesture for silence. "Not so loud, Finicky, for God's sake!" he pleaded.

Flynn snatched his gun back from DeWitt's unresisting clutch.

"I don't want no murderers in my room," he said, indicating the door.

"I didn't do it, Finicky! Honest to God, I didn't kill the cop."

"Who did, then?"

"I don't know."

With the open palm of his hand Flynn smacked DeWitt across the face. DeWitt staggered back and sat down on the bed.

"You come here askin' favors," said Flynn, "and then you lie to me."

"Honest, Finicky, I don't know who did it," said DeWitt. "Honest."

There was no fight in him. The old Cocky DeWitt would have struck back. The figure before Flynn now was terrified, abject, pitiful.

"Then what you doin' sniveling around here?" Flynn asked.

"Lock the door!" pleaded DeWitt. Then he began his story.

"After I left your feed cart with Max Shavers," he said, "we went over to Jake's for a couple of beers. Then Max sent me on an errand and told me to meet him in Jay Street—"

"What kind of an errand?" interruped Flynn.

"He sent me after some stuff."

"What kind of stuff?"

"Some—well, some snow."

"Go on."

"Well, it must have been pretty near an hour before I got back to Jay Street—"

"Say, what's the idea of that Jay Street place, anyhow?" Flynn broke in again. "Is it yours?"

"Well, in a way it is. I rented it for Max—"

"Did you ever live in it?"

"We both stayed in it sometimes—"

"When you were too coked up to go home?"

"Well, Max used it more than me. He seemed to want it . . . Anyhow, I got back there and started to climb the stairs. I was on the second landing when I heard three shots. I guess I was scared. I stopped. I heard feet and a door opening and being shut. Then I ran up the stairs to the room. I saw the cop laying on the floor, all bloody. There was nobody there. Max or whoever was there must have got out the fire escape. The window at the end of the hall was open. So I kept on running up the stairs to the roof. I didn't want to be caught with a dead cop in my room and a pack of nose candy in my pocket . . ."

"What did you do with the coke?"

"I dropped it down the first chimney I came to. I crawled around over the roofs in the rain. I damn near broke my neck once or twice in the dark, so I lay behind a water tank for a little while. I thought the cops would be right after me, but nobody came. Then I remembered that you lived over here by the 'L,' so I thought I'd crawl over and see if I could find your roof. Lucky I did."

"I ain't sure it was so lucky," commented Flynn.

DeWitt's tortured eyes grew larger.

"You can't turn me out, Finicky," he pleaded.

Flynn's thumb kept pushing the safety of his .45 on and off, but he did not take his eyes from DeWitt.

"Why can't I?" he asked.

"Because the breaks are against me," said DeWitt, "and I can't clear myself without ringing in Max, and if I ring in Max—" He stopped and swallowed.

"You're scared to death of that Shavers bird, ain't you?"

DeWitt did not reply.

"And he's sure as hell made a spineless, whimperin', lily-livered sap out of you in no time," Flynn continued. "You always was a cantankerous cuss, Cocky, but at least you had guts. Now, though—now you come crawlin' to the lousiest company cook in the division."

"I always said that, Finicky, but I never meant it. You know I never meant it. We got different tastes, that's all. You ain't going to let me down now, are you, Finicky?"

Flynn got up and paced the floor.

"I suppose you know, Cocky, that the cops are watchin' me," he said at last. "They come after me first crack, as soon as they decided they was lookin' for you. I was over in Jay Street and saw the mess. Poor old Hall . . . And you can bet your pants they ain't goin' to let me outa their sight. It would be a swell thing if they found you in here. They'd sure as hell have me up for defeatin' the ends of justice by harborin' a murderer . . ."

"But I didn't do it, Finicky. I've got myself in a mess, all right, but I didn't kill the cop. You believe me, don't you?"

"Cocky," said Flynn, "you're a natural-born liar. Even if I'd of liked you, I couldn't of been blind to your tossin' off a lie just as easy as the truth. I always thought you was a son-of-a-she-mule and I still think so. But for once I'm goin' to believe you. I'll probably be sorry for it, but I can't see an old soldier go downhill like you. I'm going to help you—"

"Thanks, Finicky—"

"But there's a string to it. I ain't a reformer or anything. If you want to be a crook, it's none of my business. Say so, and it's O.K. with me. But, my God, be a man at the same time—stand up and take it, if it's handed to you. If you shoot anybody, shoot it out to his

face, not in the back. If that's what you want, I'll say good-bye and bad luck to you. But if you want to try to be decent, give me your word, whatever it's worth, that you're through with Max Shavers."

"I give you my word, Finicky."

"O.K., then. Now tell me where Shavers lives."

DeWitt hesitated.

"Where does Shavers live?"

DeWitt gave an address. Flynn put his pistol in his pocket.

"All right, sit tight," he said. "I'll see you later. I'm going to lock you in, so there won't be any question about my bein' away. I'll see that you get some breakfast later."

Flynn walked down the street to the West Side subway station at Chambers Street and took the Bronx Express. It took him forty minutes to get to the address DeWitt had given him. He found no one there.

His first impulse was to return home and throw out DeWitt for shielding Shavers. Then he reflected that perhaps the address was correct, after all. Shavers was not likely to put in an appearance there if he thought the police were after him. He would have to take another tack, that's all. He took the subway back downtown. On the way he read the papers anxiously, but the murder had been too late for the morning editions.

He surprised Edwards by showing up at the Argonne Diner two hours before his accustomed time, but Edwards made no comment. He casually mentioned that two detectives had come in, looking for the boss, but did not seem curious as to their mission.

Flynn bought the early morning editions of the first evening newspaper to reach the street, and read what he sought:

COP KILLED IN DUEL WITH EX-ARMY COOK

screamed the headlines. Then followed the story:

Police today were seeking James DeWitt, discharged from the U. S. Army six months ago, as a suspect in the killing of Policeman Patrick Hall, in a Jay Street rooming house early this morning.

Hall, who succeeded in firing one shot at his murderer, was shot in the back and through the head. He had gone to DeWitt's room as a result of developments in trailing a gang of dock thieves who were active at Pier H last night.

According to Detective E. H. Gloster, DeWitt, an ex-mess sergeant and army cook, was engaged in cooking in his room just before the murder. He had gone out for something and finding Hall in his rooms on his return, shot him down without warning. He eluded police by going down the fire escape. Detective Gloster seized a number of objects, among them a saucepan in which DeWitt was cooking, and declares they represent conclusive evidence.

Max Shavers, alleged associate of DeWitt in the dock robberies, is thought to have been with him this morning and is being sought as an accomplice. R. H. Flynn, also an ex-army cook and now proprietor of a lunch wagon, has been questioned by detectives but as yet has not been held.

Hall, who was 39, leaves a wife and three children. He had been on the police force eleven years and had an excellent record.

Finicky Flynn crumpled the newspaper with a brusque movement that upset the cup of coffee he had been drinking. He swore oaths a foot long. The idea of linking his name with Max Shavers!

He was still swearing when Smith, the taxi-driver,

came into the diner and sat down. He seemed ill at ease.

"Hello, Smitty," said Flynn. "You hackin' in the daytime now?"

"Not exactly," said Smith, rubbing his crooked nose as he looked at Edwards.

"What'll it be? Ham an'?" asked Flynn.

"Naw," said Smith, still looking at Edwards. "Just—just coffee."

"Say, Edwards," said Flynn, "will you go out in back and see how much is left in that last sack of coffee?"

"Listen," said Smith in a stage whisper when Edwards had disappeared. "Max Shavers wants to see you."

"Yeah?" Flynn's heavy eyebrows raised a trifle. "Well, I don't want to see him."

"You better come along with me," said Smith nervously.

"What's the idea?" demanded Flynn. "You hooked up with Shavers?"

Smith shook his head in violent denial.

"God, no!" he said. "I'm cruising uptown last night, about an hour or so after I left here, when a guy comes running out in the rain and hails me. When he comes up I see it's Shavers. He gets in and gives me an address without recognizing me. When he finally sees my picture on the police card, he pokes a gun in my back. 'No monkey business,' he says, 'or I'll plug you and I ain't playing, either.' I takes him to a loft building in 18th Street. Still holding the gun on me, he grabs my hack badge. 'You don't know me,' he says. 'You didn't see me tonight and you can't remember this address. If you play ball, you get your badge back. If you don't, you'll be mixed up in a hell of a racket, and I got your badge to prove it.' Twenty minutes ago he phones me to come and get you and bring you to see

him right away. I think it's about DeWitt—"

"Probably," said Flynn.

"You're coming, ain't you?" asked Smith.

"So you're scared of him too?"

"I was in a jam over my license a couple months back, and this guy Shavers could make a pack of trouble for me . . ."

Flynn was drumming with his fingers on the counter. Edwards came in to announce that there was plenty of coffee left. Flynn got up.

"Edwards," he said, "I'm goin' out. I'll be back in an hour."

Fifteen minutes later Flynn got out of an elevator and walked up two flights of dusty stairs to the loft floor of an old building. At the head of the stairs a sign on a door announced the Pictinson Import and Export Company. The door was locked. Flynn pounded with his fists. The door was opened a crack and immediately shut again. Flynn resumed pounding. A few seconds later he was admitted by a weasel-eyed, shaven-headed individual who conducted him across a dismal vacant floor to another door. The second door led to an ill-lighted room in which were a few pieces of dilapidated office furniture and a dozen packing boxes. Flynn was left alone here while the weasel-eyed individual disappeared through a third door.

Flynn sat down for a moment on a dusty chair. He was distinctly uncomfortable, despite the fact that he had his .45 in his pocket. After a moment's uneasy wait, he got up and started to pace the floor. Two minutes of this, and Max Shavers appeared.

"Flynn," said Shavers, "I hate your guts."

"Same to you," said Flynn. "Is that all you wanted?"

"Sit down."

"After you," said Flynn with mock politeness.

The two men sat down facing each other across a rickety table.

"Flynn," said Shavers, "don't think I couldn't have stayed in your lousy joint last night if I'd wanted to. Don't think I don't remember that sock in the eye—"

"Listen," broke in Flynn. "You didn't send Smith around to me because you wanted to swap memories. Let's get down to business. What do you want?"

Shavers' gold teeth gleamed as he grinned. "Where's DeWitt?" he asked.

"How should I know?"

"You oughta know. He's in your room."

"Where'd you get that idea?"

Shavers continued to grin. "That's the only place left for him to go. We checked all the others. And one of the boys called at your room. He said the door was locked but he heard someone moving around inside—someone didn't answer his knock."

"Well?"

"I'm taking DeWitt out of town," said Shavers, leaning back in his chair. "See that he's at the 125th Street Station of the Lenox Avenue Subway at nine tonight. I'll pick him up in my car."

"He won't be there," said Flynn.

"He better be."

"He won't," repeated Flynn.

"In that case," said Shavers, suddenly hard, "both you and Cocky'll be in the jug by midnight—on a charge of murder."

Flynn crossed his legs, lit a cigarette and blew a gust of smoke in Shavers' face.

"Cocky didn't kill Hall," he said.

"He can't prove he didn't," said Shavers. "Nobody can prove he didn't. He won't have the ghost of an alibi, because all the places he was just before the

murder have got instructions, and none of the people in 'em saw Cocky that night. There's an air-tight case of circumstantial evidence against him, and what's against him is against you, too. You're hiding a murderer in your room."

Flynn was apparently calm, except for the fact that he was smoking furiously. "By the way," he asked with a tremendous effort to be casual, "who the hell did kill the cop, anyway?"

Shavers' gold tooth flashed again. "Wouldn't you like to know?" he sneered.

"I got my own idears," said Flynn. "Also I notice in the mornin' papers that the cops are lookin' for Max Shavers."

"Ain't you observing," commented Shavers, "for a pot wolloper."

"I was just wonderin'," Flynn came back, "if it wouldn't be a pretty good idear if instead of sendin' Cocky out to the 125th Street subway station, I called up my friend Gloster at the Detective Bureau and told him where he could find Max Shavers."

"Not very good," Shavers replied, "because before you could get out of the elevator, I'd be on the phone myself, telling where Cocky DeWitt, the murderer, was hiding, and who was hiding him."

Flynn lighted a fresh cigarette from the stub of his old one and looked about the room significantly as he again began puffing out smoke like an overworked donkey engine.

"Suppose," he said, "I decided that Cocky DeWitt is a louse, which he is—and that personally I got all the alibis I need, and that it's worth a little trouble to me, and riskin' the seat of Cocky's pants to him to see that you get what's comin' to you? Of course, if you lay off Cocky, I'd lay off you. Otherwise, my pal Gloster'll be

right up to look over your collection of Roosian sables, or whatever you got in them boxes. There's nothin' to prevent him."

"Ain't there?" Shavers pushed back his chair with a rasping sound. "There's plenty. There's me!"

Flynn did not move, but his lower jaw advanced half an inch. The muscles of his neck became suddenly visible.

"That's not enough," he said.

"It's plenty!" repeated Shavers. "The two floors below this are vacant. The walls are sound-proof. You won't get out of here—"

Flynn sprang to his feet. His right arm went back. His right hand dove swiftly for his pocket. But he did not draw his gun. Something clamped on his arm from behind, tugged, dragged it down.

Shavers leered.

Flynn spun around. He found himself staring into the weasel eyes of the shaven-headed individual who had admitted him. In the Weasel's left hand a knife gleamed. His right clung tenaciously to Flynn's gun.

Flynn executed a quick body movement that resembled somewhat a cross between a football player making a quick onside kick and a fencer doing a lunge and sidestep simultaneously. The knife clattered to the floor on the impact of Flynn's booted toe against the Weasel's knuckles. But the Weasel clung to his gun hand.

Flynn swung a left to the Weasel's head. The Weasel ducked. Flynn jerked the gun. The Weasel snapped toward him. The crotch of Flynn's elbow caught his shaven skull in a head chancery. Then Max Shavers intervened. Kicking aside the table, he swung his chair above his head, brought it down across Flynn's shoulders.

Flynn staggered forward under the blow. One of the rungs of the chair had caught him at the base of the skull, stunning him. His brain cleared almost instantly. He struggled to his feet, yanking again at his gun.

The Weasel hung on. He was smaller than Flynn, but he had a grip like a bulldog's jaw.

Then Flynn caught a glimpse of Shavers over his shoulder. Shavers was just swinging the sights of a .32 automatic into line.

"Drop that, Flynn," Shavers ordered.

For an answer, Flynn pulled the Weasel off his feet, whirled, held the struggling man between himself and Shavers.

"Go on, shoot!" said Flynn.

"I'd just as soon shoot the two of you," replied Shavers without moving. "But I'll give you a chance to change your mind. I'll count three. One—"

The prospect of being sacrificed did not appeal to the Weasel.

"Fer Gawd's sake, Max!" he panted.

"Two—"

"Max!"

Flynn felt the Weasel's grasp relax a trifle. At the same instant he picked up the Weasel, flung him bodily at Shavers, snatched back his .45. The Weasel and Shavers collapsed together against the wall.

Flynn saw Shavers' automatic merge from the tangle of arms and legs. He thrust forward the muzzle of his .45, pulled the trigger.

There was a harmless click, then another click.

Flynn swore. Damn Cocky DeWitt! This was his doing. Why the hell had Cocky unloaded Flynn's .45? Was it deliberate? Anyhow, why had he, Flynn, been damned fool enough to come on a mission like this without making sure his gun was loaded?

Shavers' gun spat flame and noise. Flynn dropped to his hands and knees. Broken plaster rained on his back. Shavers' shot had gone high, thank heavens, but the game was up. Flynn's escape was cut off. Unless—there was that third floor door just behind him! It was worth a trial.

Another report thundered in his ears and a bullet splintered into wood at his side as he crashed through the floor. Immediately afterward he realized he had made a mistake. He had run into a blind alley. The door led him into a room, piled with packing cases, from which there was no other exit. He was trapped. He hurdled a pile of boxes, prepared to barricade himself.

"You may as well come out," said the voice of Max Shavers, "and listen to reason. Otherwise I'll just lock you in and tell the cops where to find you."

Flynn said nothing.

"Come out!" chimed the shrill voice of the Weasel. Through a crack between two cases Flynn saw the Weasel advancing boldly into the room. Shavers appeared in the doorway. Flynn braced himself as the Weasel came closer. With a sudden lunge, Flynn toppled a box from the pile in front of him. The Weasel started back, too late. The heavy case fell on him, pinning his legs to the floor. He screamed. Flynn ducked as Shavers fired again. Then, peering between two boxes, he chuckled to himself. The color had gone out of Shavers' face. He was making jerky movements with his right hand. His automatic had jammed.

Flynn then straightened up, stretched himself, and in a leisurely manner clambered over the barricade of boxes. As he advanced on Shavers, he stripped off his coat and started rolling up his sleeves above the tattooed Statue of Liberty and the blue-and-red nude beauty.

"Shavers," he said, "I'm goin' to reason with you in the only way you understand. I'm goin' to argue with you till you tell me who killed Hall. And if you're too pig-headed, I'll argue you to a pulp so you'll be easier for the dicks to work on."

Shavers flung his disabled gun into Flynn's face. It struck Flynn's cheek bone, cutting a gash under his eye. Flynn continued to advance. Shavers turned to run. Flynn made a dive for him, caught the back of his coat collar with his left hand, yanked him back to smash his right to the mouth. He released his hold, squared off to repeat the dose when Shavers, spitting blood, frantic, came at him with eyes closed, swinging his fists blindly, desperately. One of the wild blows caught Flynn on the point of the chin. He stopped, surprised, badly jolted. He shook his head fiercely. Shavers had again turned to run.

Again Flynn started after him, but this time Shavers had a good start. He fled down the vacant loft, his footsteps echoing hollowly. He reached the outside door five paces in the lead, slammed the door in Flynn's face, locked it.

Flynn swore eloquently as he applied his shoulder. Between the whacking sounds of his shoulder against the door paneling, he heard Shavers' steps on the staircase, then the whine of the ascending elevator.

By the time Flynn had smashed and splintered his way out, Shavers had reached the street. Flynn renewed his profanity, but with a sinking feeling now. Shavers, at liberty, was certain to claim vengeance. In five minutes the police would take DeWitt in Flynn's room.

Max Shavers got out of the elevator, holding his handkerchief to his mouth to hide the trickle of blood. He could feel his cut lips puffing as he walked rapidly

down the street and around the corner. He entered a cigar store, stepped into a phone booth, dropped in a dime and called a number.

"This is Max," he said, holding his mouth close to the transmitter. "Listen. Get this. We got to get rid of DeWitt . . . Yeah, but he's in bad hands, and we can't be bothered . . . Who? Why, of course . . . I know, but you'll get your jack tonight . . . You'll get it, I tell you. You already got some, didn't you? . . . All right . . . He's in Flynn's room . . . Use the same gun . . . and leave it around . . . Yeah, I want Flynn to get hooked on this . . . Listen, get over there right away. No, sooner than that . . . Because in five minutes I'm calling the cops to tell 'em that DeWitt is at Flynn's . . . They'll find the corpse, but be sure they don't find you . . . That's your problem. We skip tonight . . . I'll call you at Jake's in an hour. . . ."

Shavers hung up. He stood a moment staring at the telephone instrument, seemed on the point of dropping in another dime, then hurried out. He wasn't taking a chance of the call being traced. He walked a block to a drug store, entered another booth. He took a little book from his pocket and consulted a list of names. He needed money before he left town, since he might be a long time away from the source of supply. The names in the book were the names of customers of the Pectinson Export and Import Co. Most of them were fences, who, though by tacit understanding the matter was never mentioned, knew they were buying stolen furs. A few of them were legitimate buyers; in dealing with these, neither Shavers nor the mythical Pectinson concern ever entered into the dealings.

Cocky DeWitt had been the go-between with these accounts—which was one of the reasons that Shavers had just decided against allowing DeWitt to fall into

the hands of the police. The professional fences would all be wary, if not absolutely out of sight, after the publicity given last night's affair at the pier. No chance of getting any money out of them. The legitimates always paid by check; that was no good either. The only possibility was a sort of dabbler named Letterman. Letterman was not a professional yet he certainly knew the sort of goods he was buying. Shavers called up Letterman.

"Hello, Mr. Letterman, this is James Witt," said Shavers. "I've got a bargain in a small lot of sables this morning. You can have them cheap—for cash . . . No, Mr. Letterman, that business at the pier didn't have anything to do with us . . . Yes, I know, but not actually . . . No, there's not the least bit of danger. I can send them over right now . . . Well, all right . . . Yes, I can meet you there if you want. At what time? . . . Not before? . . . All right, then . . . Don't forget the cash."

Well, that settled that. It was a damned nuisance to have to wait until eight o'clock, but maybe it was best after all. Things would be simpler in the dark. And now—Shavers looked at his watch. It was seven minutes since he had given orders to put DeWitt out of the way. It was time now to call the cops.

"Hello, detective bureau? . . . Say, that guy DeWitt you want for plugging Hall this morning just went up to Finicky Flynn's room . . . Yeah, on Greenwich Street. Better hurry."

Shavers hung up, rushed from the drug store, jumped in a taxi and sped across town.

Finicky Flynn half walked, half ran down 18th Street. His impulse was to get Cocky DeWitt out of his room somehow. It seemed futile, though. Max Shavers would

certainly have the cops there before he could get home. His next thought was to call a cop and take him back to Shavers' loft. That wasn't much good, either. The cops might find the Weasel, if he hadn't managed to wriggle out from under the packing case, which he probably had. They'd find some stolen furs, maybe. But that wouldn't be much help in the present crisis. Perhaps he ought to ignore the whole business and go right to the lunch wagon. He ought to do that anyhow, before that fool Edwards ruined a lot of good food; Edwards never could cook a decent pot roast. Still that wouldn't advance things any. The cops would certainly come around to the Argonne Diner, after they'd pinched Cocky. Flynn might just as well go home and face it out. Maybe Shavers got cold feet, after all, and blew without sicking the cops on him and Cocky. It seemed pretty far-fetched; but it was worth a try.

He saw the blue-and-white sign of a West Side subway station in front of him. He hurried his pace and ran down the steps. At Fourteenth Street he changed to an express. A few minutes later he was running down the sidewalk in the gloom of the "L" trestle. He was still fifty yards from his door when, above the roar of a passing "L" train, he heard the screech of a siren. He dropped into a rapid walk just as two motorcycles and an automobile swung around the corner. Just before he reached the door, Gloster, another detective and two uniformed policemen got out of the police car. Gloster barred the entrance with his arm.

"So you were lying to me after all!" growled the detective.

"Me? Lyin' to you?" protested Flynn. "What about?"

"You got James DeWitt hid away in your room," said Gloster.

"If I did, it wouldn't be nothin' to lie about," Flynn

replied. "Cocky DeWitt ain't the man you want."

"That's for me to say." The heavy tread of ample feet resounded in the musty stairway as the four policemen, Gloster leading, started climbing.

"Listen, Mr. Gloster," Flynn called from the bottom step. "Give me till tonight, and I'll get you the bird that killed Officer Hall."

Gloster paused and turned around.

"You will?"

"Yeah. I got some new leads. I been workin' on this case."

"Well, don't. This case is already cluttered up with too damn many amateur detectives, what with the Furriers' Protective dicks underfoot every time we turn around. Blast them anyway!"

"This is different. I already located Max Shavers. He's the one that cracked me in the eye—"

"Where's Shavers?" Gloster took a step down.

"He got away," admitted Flynn reluctantly, "but—"

Gloster snorted incredulously and resumed climbing the stairs.

Flynn started after him. "Listen, Mr. Gloster," he called.

But Gloster would not listen. He was on the second landing already. The steps creaked as Flynn followed, hesitantly.

Above, he heard Gloster's bass voice swearing. He increased his stride to three steps at a time, came upon the group of policemen standing at his threshold. His door stood wide open. Gloster was examining marks on the wood about the lock. The door had evidently been jimmied. The two uniformed men were inside the room. Flynn pushed in with them.

There was no one else in the room. Cocky DeWitt was gone.

The policemen were ransacking the room.

The second plainclothesman called to Gloster from the open window.

"He could have got out here," he said, as he leaned out. "He could have slid down the drain pipe."

Gloster was glowering at Flynn.

"You made that fake phone call yourself, didn't you?" he said. "You wanted to get us over here so you could spill some more of your damned theories. DeWitt never was here."

"That's what I been tellin' you," said Flynn. "But I didn't make no phone call. I—"

With an oath Gloster pushed past him and went out. His retinue followed.

Finicky Flynn went back to the Argonne Diner. That louse DeWitt must have walked out on him to go back to Max Shavers. Probably couldn't stand being without his ration of dope. Well, the hell with him. Flynn had done all he could.

He found Edwards busy with half a dozen lunch customers. He put on his apron, tasted some of the things Edwards had prepared, made faces, added seasoning in an attempt at rescue. For the next hour and a half he was busy dishing out meals. He was not too busy, however, to note one new customer. With a slouch hat pulled down over his eyes, he was seated at the end stool. He ordered dish after dish, ate slowly and very little of each, and read a newspaper with great deliberation. He had been there an hour at least. He looked like a dick, Flynn reflected as he went to the pantry to slice some bacon from the side he kept hanging there.

Crouching among the sacks of potatoes and beans he saw Cocky DeWitt.

Flynn closed the door.

DeWitt stood up and spoke quickly in a breathless stage whisper. "Sorry, Finicky—I didn't have no other place to go. I left your room right after you did this morning— Somebody came up and knocked and called my name—I slid down the drain—I—"

The door burst open. The man with the slouch hat stood there, a gun in his fist.

"All right, DeWitt," he said. "Stick out your hands."

He flipped a pair of handcuffs out of his pocket, snapped them deftly about DeWitt's trembling wrists.

"Cocky didn't kill Hall," Flynn started to explain, "Cocky—"

"Oh, he didn't?" exclaimed the man with the slouch hat sarcastically. "Well, it happens that we got the gun that killed Hall. A guy picked it up and brought it in today and the ballistics expert identified it. The permit for that gun was issued to James DeWitt."

"But—"

"You come along too, Flynn."

"Me?" Flynn was dismayed, not at the thought of arrest, but at the thought that, in custody, he would be unable to continue his research in aid of DeWitt. Not that he had done much as yet, but—"

"Come on!" ordered the man with the slouch hat, gesturing with his gun.

Cocky DeWitt made a sudden upward movement with his manacled hands. A detonation followed almost simultaneously as the gun discharged through the ceiling.

"Beat it, Finicky!"

Flynn bolted—not because he was afraid to face false charges but because he still had an idea he could clear Cocky DeWitt. He ran out the back door, crossed a parking lot, threaded his way through traffic, dropped into a walk and at least for the moment achieved anonymity in the sidewalk crowds.

He spent the next two hours in the subway. It was the only place he could think of going at the time. He was lost in the crowds so far as the police were concerned. And he could think. He still had his theory, but he would have to find some way of making the cops listen to him. If he could only make Gloster take him seriously.

He got off several times to change trains, so that the guards would not become suspicious of him. Once he bought an evening paper. As he read the developments in the murder case, his eyes bulged:

Two suspected in the Pier H fur robbery and the subsequent murder of Policeman Patrick Hall were arrested at the same hour today in different parts of the city.

James DeWitt, ex-army cook was arrested in a West Street lunch wagon. DeWitt, police say, did the actual shooting. The permit for the gun that killed Hall was issued in his name.

P. H. Johnson, a red-haired youth who claims to be an unemployed market worker, was arrested when he applied for treatment at Bellevue Hospital for a bullet wound in his leg. Detective Harry Gloster says Johnson has been linked definitely to the crime.

At the next station Flynn jumped off the train, rushed to the first white-tiled telephone booth he saw, and called Police Headquarters.

"Hello, Gloster?" he said, after he asked to be connected with the detective bureau. "Say, where have you got that red-headed kid Johnson . . . Yes, it is my business. This is R. H. Flynn talkin' . . . Wait a minute. Hold on there before you start tracin' this call. I'm comin' in to give myself up pretty soon . . . Where's

Johnson? Centre Street? O.K., I'll come in like a nice doggy if you promise to let me talk to Johnson before you lock me up . . . Well, I got an idea . . . I know you can't make no bargains, but I ain't askin' much . . . Just let me talk to Johnson for five minutes . . . O.K. . . . If I can count on you, you can count on me."

They searched Flynn when he showed up at Centre Street. Then they brought him into a room where Gloster was lighting a fat cigar, preparatory to a long questioning. As he started to open up, Flynn broke in with: "Where's this kid Johnson?"

"Never mind Johnson," barked Gloster. "You're under arrest, Flynn. There's charges against you now. Resisting arrest, obstructing an officer, sheltering a criminal—"

"Listen, Gloster." Flynn's neck muscles became visible. "I come down here because you promised me I could talk to Johnson. I only want to help on this case—"

"The case is closed," snapped Gloster without removing his cigar.

"You didn't throw out that saucepan that was cookin' in the Jay Street place, did you?" asked Flynn anxiously.

"We will," answered Gloster. "We got all we need without it. We got DeWitt, we got the gun that he killed Hall with, we got this redhead. All we need now is Shavers."

"You got to let me talk to this redhead," Flynn insisted.

"Give him a whoil at the kid," said an inspector who had just come in. "Maybe he can get something out of him. So far he's been as talkative as a Blue Pernt erster."

"All right," agreed Gloster reluctantly, his teeth clamped on his cigar. "But not alone. We stay."

Johnson limped into the room between two policemen. He flushed when he saw Flynn.

"Why did you have to show up?" Johnson demanded hotly. "I've kept my mouth shut in spite of all hell, to protect you."

"Protect me? I don't need no protection," countered Flynn. "All I want to know—"

"You were damned decent to me, and the least I could do was not to let you down," the red-headed youth continued, his tongue finally loosened. "I'm sorry I sneaked out without peeling your potatoes for you. But I got panicky when I heard the cop come into your place, and my leg was bleeding pretty much. I was afraid I'd have a hard time explaining a bullet wound in the leg. You see, I was mixed up in that shooting at Pier H—but I had nothing to do with it—"

"Nothing my eye!" exclaimed Gloster, but was motioned into silence by the inspector, who was watching the redhead and Flynn with keen, shrewd eyes.

"I'd sneaked into the pier shed to get out of the rain and cold for the night," Johnson explained. "I crawled in among some boxes and sacks to find a place to sleep. When the shooting started, I tried to get out and a stray bullet nicked me in the leg. Since I had no business to be in the pier shed in the first place, I ran—"

"That's his story," broke in Gloster. "But we got evidence that ties him right up with the gang that's been stealing furs off the docks. Ain't we, Red?"

Johnson did not reply.

"What kind of evidence?" asked Flynn.

"Conclusive evidence," said Gloster. "Marked money. We been working on this case for several months. A private dick from the Furriers' Protective has kinda been working with us, and yesterday he passed out a pack of marked bills in payment for some stolen furs

One of the marked bills was in Red's pocket when we grabbed him. And he can't explain where he got the money—can you, Red?"

Johnson did not reply. He avoided Flynn's eyes.

Flynn suddenly sat forward in his chair, his eyes wide.

"Was it a two-dollar-bill?" he demanded eagerly.

"It was," said Gloster.

"Why, good God Almighty!" exclaimed Flynn. "The kid got that two bucks from me. I gave it to him!"

"So you're in on this too!"

"Hell, no! I got it outa the cash register. I took it in earlier in the night. Let me see—I got it from—" Flynn sprang to his feet. "Now I know who killed Hall!" he exclaimed. "Bojek! A spig longshoreman with a head like a hard-boiled egg. Bojek! That's the bird."

"Bojek? Say—isn't that the boid that found DeWitt's gat?" asked the inspector sharply.

"Yeah, that's his name."

"I should of thought of Bojek before," continued Flynn, running his fingers excitedly through his graying hair. "I knew all the time that the bird that was doing the cooking in that Jay Street room just before Hall was shot there was a Southern European of some kind. Did you notice the seasoning he had in that stuff in the pot? You could tell it with your eyes shut. There was a whiff of garlic and onions and bay leaves and thyme and saffron in it. I knew right away that wasn't Cocky DeWitt's cookin'. Nothin' he ever cooked had any taste at all to it. And I didn't think it was Shavers. Us—Anglo-Saxons don't cook like that. I knew there must have been some other guy in that room. And Bojek's the guy, gents!"

"How about that, Gloster?" asked the inspector. "We made Bojek's prints, didn't we? We found his prints on the gat, didn't we?"

"Sure. He handled it bringing it here. That's why we printed him, so we could tell his from the others."

"Did you find any other prints on the gat? Did you find DeWitt's?"

"Well, no, we didn't."

"Go out and get Bojek!" snapped the inspector.

"Why'd this guy Bojek want to kill Hall?" grumbled Gloster.

"He's one of Max Shavers' boys," said Flynn. "He and a truck driver named Mars was in my place waitin' for Max the night of all the shootin'. Bojek bein' a longshoreman, he'd have ways of gettin' his hand into packin' cases on the docks. He must of had somethin' incriminatin' on him when Hall walked in on him over in Jay Street. So he plugged Hall to make his getaway —that's all."

As Gloster got to his feet, the phone rang. He reached out to answer it.

"Hello . . . Yeah, Letterman . . . Where? . . . On the ramp? . . . Half an hour? . . . O.K. We'll be there all right."

Gloster hung up. He shifted his cigar from one side of his mouth to the other.

"It's that Furriers' Protective dick," he said. "He says he's got a date with the dock thieves on the Manhattan ramp of Brooklyn Bridge, in half an hour. Want me to go?"

"Go on," said the inspector. "I'll look out for things here. I'm going to turn the redhead loose." He nodded toward Flynn. "And you better take Sherlock Holmes here with you."

Max Shavers and Bojek were both in the car that drove up the Brooklyn Bridge ramp, with Mars, Bojek's friend, at the wheel. A long low Isotta-Fraschini coupé,

driven by a man in dinner jacket, turned onto the ramp to follow them. When Shavers' car slowed to a crawl. The foreign coupé drew alongside, slowed also, and the man in the dinner jacket handed a packet to Shavers.

"Jump on the gas, Mars!" Shavers ordered when he had the packet in his hands. But Mars jumped on the brakes instead. Another car had suddenly cut in ahead of him and pulled to a stop. A third car boxed him in from the rear. Guns bristled in all three cars. Shavers, Bojek, and Mars surrendered without a struggle.

"This is Letterman, the Furriers' Protective dick," said Gloster afterwards, introducing Flynn to the man in the evening clothes.

"I've met him," said Flynn. "Say, listen, Gloster. How about lettin' Cocky DeWitt out, now that I've got the right bird for you?"

"There's still charges against DeWitt," said Gloster.

"But I can fix it to put up bail for him," said Flynn. "I'll—" He looked at his watch. "Good God!" he exclaimed, "I got to be gettin' back to the lunch wagon or that guy Edwards'll be losin' me every reg'lar customer I got with his rotten cookin'."

THE ELEVEN DIPLOMATS

by John Jakes

A GUITAR plunked in the soft Argentine night. The music was suddenly disturbed by a man's thick, howling laugh.

"Oh, by God, that's really rich!" The basso voice of The Honorable Andrew Jackson Horner of the diplomatic service floated through the windows of the Buenos Aires embassy. In the dark garden, smoking and leaning idly against a palm tree, Roger suddenly collected his wits. He must be hearing things. But if Horner was not laughing like a man who had imbibed too much liquor and thereby lost his inhibitions, Roger would eat his hat.

Nimbly Roger vaulted the low terrace wall and peered

through the open windows. In the center of the gold-and-blue chamber Horner, in tails, was vigorously slapping the back of the blue-chinned little bulldog, Generalissimo Ibanez Ruiz Feliz, the new South American strong man. Around the guest, Feliz, and the host, Horner, clustered ten emissaries of governments in the southern hemisphere, decorations and diplomatic sashes a-gleam. All these eleven had come to woo Feliz in a series of important talks, of which this dinner party was but the preamble. If Horner was getting fried again, everything could be ruined . . .

But how, Roger wondered, could Horner be managing to get tipsy? He had sworn off the stuff years ago, when his career was threatened by his excesses. Each of the diplomats had nothing more harmless than a cut-glass punch cup in hand. The punch recipe had been expressly checked by Horner's blonde, teetotaling wife Jennielou.

Horner grew more boisterous by the second. As official watchdog Roger had to do something. But what?

At that instant a young woman in an ice-blue gown passed the window. Roger hissed, clutched her arm and pulled her outside. She covered her mouth with her hands, giggling.

"Mrs. Horner!" Roger said, alarmed. "You haven't been drinking, have you?"

"Little me?" Jennielou Horner said. "No, silly. You know my feelings about demon rum."

"Then why's that party falling apart in there?" Roger pressed. "I'd swear it was the old Andrew Horner . . . look at him! He just slapped Generalissimo Feliz on the back, again."

Jennielou Horner blinked muzzily. "Mr. Roger, I hired the catering service for this charming little affair after making quite sure they would follow my wishes in the preparation and service of non-alcoholic refreshments.

I'm well aware of the hazards that could threaten our South American defense system if my husband doesn't make a good impression on the Generalissimo and win his . . ." Mrs. Horner belched gently. ". . . support immediately."

Roger screwed up his face, puzzled. "What's in that punch they're drinking?"

"Fruit juices only," said Mrs. Horner. "Now stop worrying, silly. I told them they didn't need to send you. When Andy married me, he knew he had to toe the line, and he's doing it. 'Bye."

Waving her handkerchief as she hurried inside, Mrs. Horner destroyed the conviction of her small, impassioned speech by emitting another high-pitched giggle. Roger noticed that the emissary from Bogota had fallen on the floor. Andrew Jackson Horner was bending over him waggling a finger and bellowing with mirth. The representative from Caracas and his companion from Lima were glancing about as if expecting someone to fill their punch-cups.

The hair on the back of Roger's neck prickled uneasily. Mrs. Horner, too, was becoming drunk. If she knew nothing about alcohol introduced into the punch (alcohol which would turn Horner bullyish and borish and probably alienate Feliz, who seemed the only sober-looking member of the group inside) then someone else was responsible. Pondering this, Roger started visibly when teeth clamped into his leg. He jumped a foot, then dragged himself free.

The embassy mongrel, a hairless bitch named Evita, leaped affectionately against him.

Roger patted the dog, eyes lighting with a thought.

"Wait right here, pooch. I'll get you a treat."

Unnoticed by the merrymakers, Roger slipped inside to where a dour Latin from the catering service presided

over the punch bowl. Roger helped himself to a cup. He carried it back to the terrace and set it down in front of the dog. Evita sniffed. Then she lapped it up.

Five minutes later she was running frantically through the garden, barking wildly, turning clumsy somersaults and acting thoroughly intoxicated. Roger checked his automatic. Then he set off through the garden, passed through the wall and emerged in the star-lit alley behind the grounds. Further along, a truck was parked by the service entrance.

On its side panels Roger could translate the words *Las Papayas Catering Service.* The rear doors were unlocked. Roger climbed inside.

He unlimbered a pocket flash and played it over the storage bins built into the sides of the truck. Dishes, glasses, silver . . . suddenly the beam of the flash picked out a familiar shape. He shifted the light and let out a gasp.

Pushed back in a corner sat a cardboard case of a popular brand of vodka. Roger lifted the lid. Six of the original two-dozen bottles were missing. As if to confirm his grim suspicions, the bullish laughter of Andrew Horner boomed through the night, carrying a long distance due to the amplifying powers of alcohol. Roger began to run the flash beam over the shelves again, searching for further evidence that the catering service was in the employ of someone bent on breaking up the diplomatic relations with the Generalissimo.

"Have you found anything interesting?" said an all-too-familiar voice behind Roger.

Roger spun, nearly dropping his light. Into its beam lurched the dour Latin from the punch bowl who produced a pistol from beneath his apron and proceeded to relieve Roger of his automatic. A second flashlight glowed, much more powerful. It was held by the speaker. In its glow

Roger could see a blonde, statuesque and ravishingly beautiful young woman whose tailored suit could not hide her voluptuous curves. Roger groaned.

"Everywhere there's dirty work, I ought to expect you to be hanging around, Maria."

Maria Schon laughed gayly. "Correction, dear Roger. Everywhere that there is an advantage to be gained for my cause, you will find me. As I find you. That is why we're constantly at swords' points."

Maria sighed. "How much sweeter it would be if you'd simply have some sense and let us join forces. The two of us, working together, could make a fortune in a year. We'd be invincible." Maria touched his cheek. "In addition to bringing into existence once more those delightful experiences we shared in Cannes. You can't have forgotten, Roger . . . ?"

"I haven't forgotten that," Roger said. "Or how I felt when I found afterward just who you worked for. That lovey talk won't work with me, Maria. You'd toss your baby nephew to the crocodiles if it would do you any good. So kindly skip the propaganda."

"You make our infrequent meetings so difficult to bear," came Maria's wistful sigh. But a moment later she was chattering rapidly in Spanish to the caterer's employee, whose name appeared to be Porfiro.

From a shelf Porfiro produced a hank of rope. He forced Roger to a sitting position, bound his hands behind his back, at the same time administering quite a few unnecessary kicks and gouges, grinning in swarthy satisfaction. When Porfiro finished Maria purred:

"We will decide what is to become of you when the party's over. When the Honorable Mr. Horner has gotten thoroughly drunk, insulted the Generalissimo and ruined all possibilities for success in the talks. Oh, we know all about Horner. Such a boor, in his cups. He was nearly

dismissed from the diplomatic service. Porfiro, bring along one or two more bottles. That punch needs sweetening."

Porfiro obeyed, leaving the truck. While Roger glared, Maria snapped off her flash. "He's a loyal fellow. An expert killer. And sharp-eyed. He saw you give the punch to that wretched dog, through the window. You really should be more careful, Roger . . ." A laugh, and the truck door slammed.

Roger struggled against the ropes. They held him securely. He sat for a moment pondering various possibilities and struggling against the bonds, getting nowhere. He kicked at the case of vodka in disgust. Time was slipping fast. How drunk was Andrew Jackson Horner by this time?

Roger wrenched and threw himself across the truck floor. The rope cut deep into his wrists. Panting, he stopped. No use. Then, off in the night he heard a mournful howling. Roger sat up straight, cursing himself. It had been in front of him all the time. With his teeth Roger lifted the lid of the vodka carton.

It required extremes of strength and coordination to get the neck of one of the fifths between his teeth, then struggle to a standing position, bend over and drop the bottle.

But the bottle didn't break. The floor of the truck was covered with some sort of rubberized matting.

By the time Roger had tried his seventh fifth, feeling as though his teeth were coming out at the roots, he was ready to give it up. Then a chance twist of his head made the bottle spin down toward one of the shelves. It cracked against an iron stanchion. It broke.

Liquor dribbled down the channels in the flooring. Roger sat down, turned and scrabbled until his hands closed on a large triangle of glass. He started sawing frantically.

Forty minutes later, his sleeves drenched with alcohol and some blood from several cuts on his wrists, he tottered through the garden. He fumbled in his coat. Didn't he have any matches, damn it? At last he discovered a crumpled packet in the back pocket of his trousers. He reeled across the terrace of the embassy.

Roger expected the dinner to already be in progress. Then he realized the worst when he saw Generalissimo Feliz, Horner and the others still standing, or more appropriately, swaying, in the center of the blue-and-gold chamber. Right among them, Jennielou Horner was exclaiming, "I declare, Andy, these Argentine people are a miracle . . . to think they can make such an exciting punch without a drop of liquor."

Roger headed inside, matches clutched in his hand. Behind the punch bowl Porfiro's eyebrows shot up in alarm. His hand burrowed wildly beneath his apron. Roger rounded the table and hammered Porfiro's jaw. He snatched back his own automatic as the man dropped. Roger swung around. The guests were all watching him.

"Mrs. Horner," said Roger, "I'm afraid you've been serving spiked punch. It was done deliberately to get this little shindig off on the wrong foot."

"That is an untruth, sir," Jennielou said loftily, advancing on him with a gleam of wrath in her pretty eyes. "I am a non-drinker, sir. I would not allow such sinful potations in my house."

Roger tore off a paper match, struck it and dropped it flaming into the punch bowl. Jennielou Horner darted back with a tiny shriek.

There was a puffing explosion. The surface of the liquid in the bowl began to shimmer and glow with blue flames.

"That's bound to be nearly ninety proof," said Roger. "You'd better switch to water."

Suddenly he sighted Maria Schon in the terrace door-

way, levelling a pistol. Roger tackled Jennielou Horner and dumped her on the marble floor just as Maria's shot blew the punch bowl to bits.

Roger leaped to his feet. He ran out into the darkness. Maria was crashing away through the garden. Roger ran after her. This time she wouldn't escape him.

He was just rounding the sunken pool when from the darkness leaped Evita, who tore at his vodka-soaked sleeve in an intoxicated appeal for more spirits.

A minute later Roger picked himself up from the grass as the caterer's truck roared away in the night.

Roger hesitated. Then he ran back toward the embassy. Angry, recriminating voices, both male and female, were raised. Hell, he thought. I've made it worse instead of better.

"You promised, Andy Horner!" Jennielou was exclaiming tearfully to her husband.

"Now hold on, honey!" boomed Horner. "It strikes me you're a mite hypocritical, seeing as you put down all that punch yourself. Never saw you so cross-eyed before . . ."

"You . . . you . . ." Only the presence of the wobbling diplomats prevented her from speaking her mind. "You must have known!" she amended. "You've been packing it away!"

Solemnly Andrew Jackson Horner raised his right hand.

"Jennielou dear, I have indeed been using a punch cup, but I have not tasted a drop of that stuff all evening. If you must make me admit my guilt, why, I've been drawing on a private source. I thought that punch would be nothing but a lot of fruit juices. Ugh." Horner made a face.

"Oh, oh!" Jennielou wailed. "The promises you made . . . the solemn vows . . . oh, Andy . . ."

Unless Roger, or someone, intervened, a fist fight would start next moment. Roger started forward.

"Folks, why don't we see about some dinner, or . . . hey!"

Roger had the answer. Unceremoniously he lifted the tail of Generalissimo Feliz's uniform blouse and jerked out a large silver flask.

"Is this the private source?"

Generalissimo Ibanez Ruiz Feliz grew shame-faced.

"Senor, it is. I had heard, regrettably, that the reformed Senor Horner was something of a bore, but that the liquid Senor Horner, in moderation, became quite amusing. I have been supervising his intake carefully. He has not had too much. I find him, and all these gentlemen, thoroughly delightful companions."

"By God, you're all right, Feliz!" exclaimed Horner, clapping the Generalissimo on the back and nearly knocking him down.

Jennielou began to wail.

Horner resumed a shady anecdote he had been telling, and the diplomats, including Feliz, gathered around him in the highest good will. Roger put his arm gently around the shoulders of Horner's wife and with considerable sympathy said:

"Sometimes you have to sacrifice for a patriotic cause. Come on, Mrs. Horner. The party's saved. Let's go find a Bromo somewhere for both of us."

FREDRIC BROWN, AUTHOR OF "THE LENIENT BEAST" AND OTHER NOVELS, A SUPERB CHRONICLER OF MORES AND URGES JUST OFF MAIN STREET AND OVER BEHIND THE MAIN LINE, PRESENTS A STUDY IN MURDER, SET AGAINST AN UNUSUAL AND VIVID BACKGROUND. . . .

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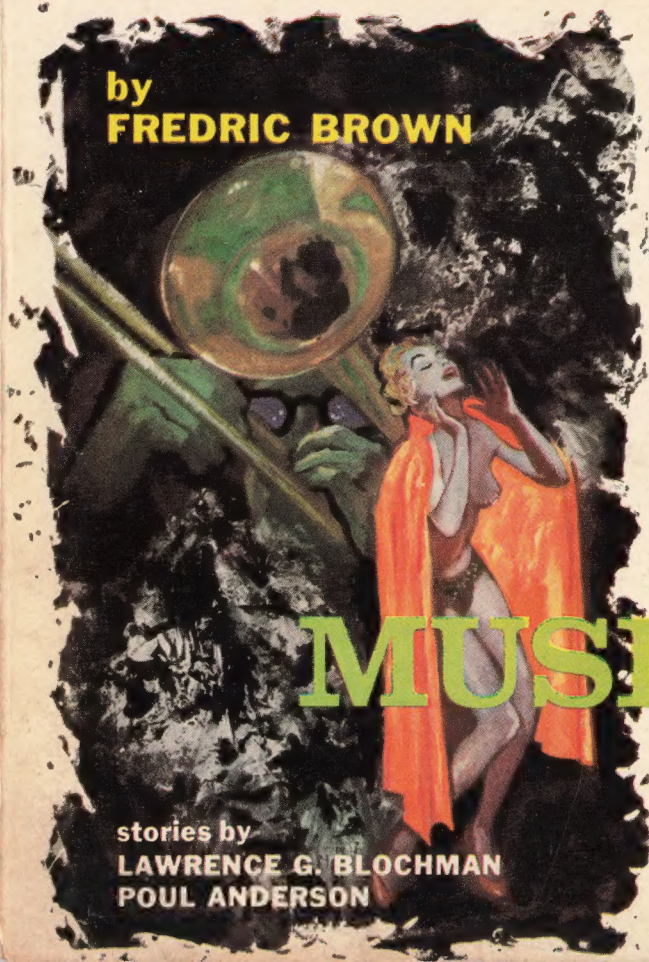

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